SANDWELL
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AN EDITION OF THE SANDWELL AND GREAT BARR CHRONICLE

Santa's torch-lit journey through Warley Woods – see page 3

There's nothing like a panto dame: meet Biggins in The Pulse from page 23

Albion all smiles as they Toon up for big derby days – see page 44

Wedding ring is stolen from a Parkinson's sufferer on bus

POLICE in Sandwell are appealing for information after a man with a degenerative brain disease was targeted by two women who stole his wedding ring in a heartless robbery.

The 64-year-old was travelling on the 74 bus from Dudley to West Bromwich, between 2.45pm and 3pm on Wednesday, November 24, when he was approached by two women. They told the victim, who has Parkinson's Disease and Progressive Supranuclear Palsy, that they were selling gold and attempted to make him try on rings.

Replaced

It was not until the he returned home that his family noticed the rings he had been wearing had been replaced with cheap metal rings.

Police say the two women are described as both being aged under 40, Eastern Europeans wearing "Romanian-style" clothing.

PC Wendy Hands from West Bromwich police station, said: "This is a callous robbery where the offenders have deliberately targeted a visibly vulnerable member of the public and taken advantage of his condition.

"The rings that were taken are of great sentimental value to the victim and his family."

Anyone with any information is urged to contact PC Hands at Sandwell Police on 0345 113 5000 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Fourth man on murder charge

A FOURTH man has been charged with the murder of Erdington shopkeeper Suppiah Tharmaseelen.

The man, aged 24 from Erdington, was arrested on Monday morning and charged that evening with murder and robbery. He was due to appear at Sutton Magistrates Court this week.

Mr Tharmaseelen, a 48-year-old family man, died after an attempted robbery at Haresh's Convenience Store in College Road, Kingstanding, on November 27. Three other men have been charged with murder and robbery and all have been remanded in custody.

Two men stabbed

TWO men have been arrested and bailed after a stabbing in West Bromwich over the weekend.

Officers on patrol at around 1.45am on Sunday came across two young men outside the Robin's Nest pub on Great Bridge Street who had suffered stab wounds. Paramedics attended and took two teenagers, both aged 17, to hospital, where they remain in a serious but stable condition. Officers arrested two males nearby a short time later.

Blaze guts home

FIRE gutted a family's terraced home in Smethwick. Firefighters were called to the three storey mid-terrace in Montague Road, Cape Hill, at around 2pm on Saturday, to tackle the fire which was spreading to a neighbouring property.

The occupants of the house were not present at the time.

BUDGET FOR TRAFFIC SCHEMES WILL BE SLASHED

CUTS TO HIT SAFETY ON THE ROADS

TRAFFIC calming schemes needed in Sandwell could be put on ice due to a lack of funding.

Council bosses said residents would suffer but cost-cutting was unavoidable after the road safety budget was slashed by 25 per cent.

Councillor Derek Rowley, Sandwell's roads boss, said: "The road safety budget has been cut by around £800,000 out of £3 million in a year.

"We cannot keep the roads as safe as we would like them to be if we are hit by cuts that large in a year. Clearly the Government has little or no regard for road safety."

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Residents living near Britannia Road in Rowley Regis have submitted a 101-name petition calling for traffic calming measures on Britannia Road.

Crashes

The campaign follows two crashes in recent years on the road as it meets Haberley Road and Spring Avenue.

Council bosses said the best action they could take at the moment was to consider Britannia Road for the next programme of speed signs activated by cars.

In response to a separate request for traffic calming in February this year, council bosses said they had re-marked the road at its junction with Habberley Road and Spring Avenue.They added they would contact West Midlands Police to ask if they would consider speed enforcement campaigns on Britannia Road.

In August, The Chronicle's sister newspaper The Express & Star revealed damaged street signs were no longer being repaired in the borough due to cost-cutting.

Replacing or repairing signs costs the council £20,000 a year. The authority this week blamed speeding drivers for the damage.

Signs and barriers have been damaged in the borough in the past six months and are yet to be repaired. Locations include the junction of the A41 and Hallens Drive in Wednesbury.

Internet auction fraudsters ordered to pay back £36,000

THREE fraudsters who sold thousands of pounds of fake shoes and clothing over the internet have been ordered to pay back more than £36,000.

Conmen Jason Messenger, Kevin Gibbons and Simon Jones, all from Sandwell, used auction website ebay to sell counterfeit Nike trainers and Timberland boots.

On Monday they were back at Wolverhampton Crown Court for a proceeds of crime hearing when Judge Michael Challinor formally confiscated the remaining funds.

The payback amount is less than 12 per cent of the £317,629 that the conmen raked in from the scam.

Messenger, aged 38, of Britannia Road, Rowley Regis, appeared in the dock following completion of half an 18-month prison sentence for possessing goods with a false trademark for sale and fraud relating to false bids on ebay.

Joining him were Gibbons, of Ascot Close, Oldbury, and Jones, of Midhill Drive, Rowley Regis, who were both given suspended prison sentences for selling fake label shoes on ebay.

Police raided their homes in November 2007 and seized fake goods.

The court heard on Monday that Messenger had benefited by £232,523 but had only £25,304 available. He was given 12 months to pay the available amount back.

Gibbons, 27, who admitted possessing goods with a false trademark for sale and received a suspended 12-month jail term and 200 hours of unpaid work, benefited by £56,454 but had only £8,664.

Jones, 30, who admitted the same charge and was given a nine-month suspended jail sentence and 120 hours of unpaid work, benefited by £28,652 but had just £2,256 available.

Both were given six months to pay back the available amounts.

Jason Messenger

Kevin Gibbons

Simon Jones

Big decision for school's governors

CONSULTATION on proposals to turn an outstanding Sandwell school into an academy has been completed. Governors, staff and parents at Wood Green High School, Wednesbury, were asked for their views on proposals to change the school's status.

Headteacher Pank Patel said: "I can't disclose the details of the consultation because it's confidential. But most of the comments were positive."

If the Wood Green Road school becomes an academy, it could become free from Sandwell Council control. Governors will look at the information from consultation and decide whether or not to press ahead with the plan.

Academies are state-funded schools set up with help from sponsors such as universities, businesses, or even local authorities. They can set their own curriculum and teachers' pay or vary the length of their days and terms.

West Bromwich Youth Council chairman Diego Wright and librarian and senior youth worker Sue Clark prepare for Santa's grotto at Central Library, West Bromwich

Library is hosting Father Christmas

CHRISTMAS will come early for dozens of starry-eyed children in West Bromwich this weekend when Santa's grotto opens at the town's Central Library.

Santa will be hearing festive wishes at the High Street library from 10am to 3pm on Saturday. Admission to the grotto will be £2.50 per person including a goody bag and a photograph.

The festive visit has been organised by library staff and West Bromwich Youth Council, with proceeds going to fund dozens of projects providing activities for young people in the town. These will include a Sandwell's Got Talent show next year.

The youth council will also host a series of Christmas activities for children aged up to 10, including card making and decorating. Admission will be free and no advanced booking necessary for these activities.

Librarian Sue Clark, who is a senior youth worker, said: "We are looking to get more children and young people involved in the libraries, so this seemed like a great way of promoting the service."

Best of brass in church

LANGLEY Brass band will be raising the roof at a Great Barr church for a festive performance.

St Bernard's Church, Broom Avenue, Hampsted, will host the event on Friday, December 17, at 8pm.

Tickets are £7, which includes refreshments and there will also be a bar. For further information, contact Val Comery on 01213 582502.

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Panto time with Goody Two Shoes

A THEATRE'S next performance will be pantomime Goody Two Shoes by Paul Reakes and presented by Highbury Players from December 21 to January 1.

The Highbury Theatre Centre is in Boldmere, Sutton Coldfield, and tickets are priced £7 and £8. To book call the box office on 0121 373 2761.

Another panto, Cinderella, by Top Theatre Company will follow from January 4 to 8 atthe Sheffield Road venue,

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School choir entertain shoppers

THE shopping ailes were alive with the sound of music when 40 Park Hill Primary School pupils from Wednesbury were among eight primary schools singing carols in a competition at Dudley's Merry Hill Shopping Centre.

Deputy head and former music teacher Samantha Wallett said she and the childrens' current music teacher Tanya Myatt had been training the children "over the past four weeks.

"They were very excited about performing and I'm very proud of them. It was quite a stressful day as Ofsted visited in the morning but still, the children rose to the challenge."

The children, whose hair and uniform was decorated with tinsel, sang Starry Night, In The Bleak Midwinter, Beneath the Stars, Walking in a Winter Wonderland, and Rejoice With Us This Christmas – during which 10-year-old Leah Henry sang a solo.

Heats started on November 29 and run through to December 10.

Council will not risk raiding its reserves

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DIPPING into council cash reserves to protect public services and jobs would only cause future problems, Sandwell's finance boss warns.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has revealed that scores of councils are sitting on millions of pounds of public money. In Sandwell the council has £20.8 million in reserve. Communities Secretary Eric Pickles says councils should consider dipping into the cash.

He says they should use it in tough times to help manage consequences of the economic downturn but the borough's finance chief says using reserves as a "quick fix" would only cause longer term problems.

Councillor Steve Eling, Sandwell's cabinet member for strategic resources, said: "It would be crazy to do it, you can only spend the resources once and they are there to run cash flow. It is a false economy to raid the balances so it's not something that I am planning to do.

"If things get that desperate, that there is no other option, Britain has become a Third World country.

Stupid

"In Sandwell we will deliver a balanced budget that is robust, that's not storing up problems for future years and to do anything otherwise would just be stupid."

All councils keep large sums of money in reserve so that they have a financial cushion to meet sudden unexpected costs.

The need to drive down unnecessary spending means councils are facing additional pressures on budgets.

But some senior people in the Coalition Government believe it is sensible for them to consider drawing on reserves to meet short-term problems.

In Sandwell the council is to save about £75 million over four years, placing hundreds of jobs at risk.

Threat to schools

THE threats to projects to rebuild and refurbish schools have been flagged up as he biggest risks facing Sandwell Council.

Sandwell's strategic risk register names Building Schools for the Future as at high risk. It gives the project and capital schools funding a risk score of 12, making it a red risk – the highest on the scale.

The register states that failure to develop schools could result in overcrowding and an adverse effect on education. The findings will be reported to Sandwell's audit committee.

The borough was dealt a devastating blow when in July education secretary Michael Gove announced nine schools would see rebuilding projects axed when he cut £138 million from Sandwell's Building Schools for the Future scheme.

Sandwell Council is now pursuing a judicial review over the scrapping of the schemes.

Patrols combat festive crimes

POLICE are stepping up Oldbury patrols in a bid to prevent festive season crime. Officers have launched Operation Tinsel which will run until January 5 and aims to prevent a rise in thefts from vehicles at peak Christmas shopping time. Officers will concentrate patrols in the town centre, Oldbury Green Retail Park, junction 2 retail park and the Asda on Wolverhampton Road. Pc Phillip Tedstill, leading the operation, said: "The retail areas tend to get hit the hardest."

Restaurant plan for empty town pub

A PUB in West Bromwich is set to get a new lease of life as a banqueting suite, restaurant, bar and takeaway and will create seven jobs.

The Queens Head in Stoney Lane has been empty for months, and thieves have already plundered the site for copper piping and other metal.

It has now been bought in a £203,000 sale by West Bromwich developer Mr Raj Parekh, who intends to submit planning applications within weeks.

Father-of-four Mr Parekh, who already owns residential properties in the town's High Street, says the plan is to open an Indian restaurant on the site"

Elsie is 103

Celebrating Elsie Bell's 103 birthday is her daughter Georgina Brookes, carer Tracy Humphries, and Georgina's husband Don Brookes

A PARTY was held at a West Bromwich care home to celebrate the 103rd birthday of a resident.

Elsie Bell, who has lived at Allerton Court for nine years, reached the milestone last Thursday, when she was joined by friends and relatives including daughter Georgina Brookes. Her sister June Wright, who at 78 is 25 years her junior, was there with her daughter Carol attended.

Mrs Brookes, aged 68, said: "It has been a lovely day. Mom has been so happy. "We have been singing songs and we have cut a cake. She may be 103 but she is still very independent and very alert. The staff here are wonderful."

Grandmother-of-two and great grandmother of two Mrs Bell is a ormer cleaner at George Salter Collegiate Academy. Before she moved to Allerton Court, in Hydes Road, she lived in Dorsett Road in West Bromwich for 61 years.

She enjoys a couple of whiskey-topped cups of tea every day and plays bingo every afternoon. Carer Tracy Humphries said she was a delight to look after.

Cost of housing scheme going up

A SCHEME to build 15 council homes in Smethwick is set to cost hundreds of thousands of pounds more than expected.

The scheme at Raglan Road was originally estimated ataround £1.5m but costs have spiralled to £2,196,779. The increase comes as a result of the scale of the development and the condition of the site. But Sandwell Council is set to press ahead with the development, despite facing cuts of £75m over the next four years.

The minutes of a private meeting reveal Sandwell's finance boss, Councillor Steve Eling felt original quotes for the work were too high and did not represent value for money and requested a second tender process for the scheme. However, the cost remained high due to the condition of the land and the high environmental standards of the build.

Cllr Eling said the extra money would not directly affect the council's revenue account and it was important to press ahead with the scheme, otherwise the council would lose £780,000 of Government money allocated to the development.

Quickly

He said: "We need to proceed with it quickly because the Government are putting up almost £800,000 and if we didn't proceed we would have lost the Government money and still been stuck with a vacant site. This is a scheme where we have put it under additional scrutiny because of the costs to be satisfied that it is a value for money scheme."

The report adds the revised total cost will be funded by £1,181,779 from the Housing Revenue Account through borrowing over 25 years, a £780,000 grant from the Homes and Communities Agency, £175,000 from commuted sums and £60,000 from housing renewal and growth funds.

Fencing at park and cemetery

WORK will start soon on installing £100,000 of fencing around a park and cemetery in Wednesbury.

Funding has been secured for the fencing around Brunswick Park and Wood Green Cemetery in a bid to cut anti-social behaviour. Lockable gates will also be installed.

The fencing is being funded by developers that are carrying out building projects in the borough and have donated money to community projects.

The work has now gone out to tender and a company is set to be appointed shortly.

Wednesbury councillor Olwen Jones said: "We are actively now looking at the time frames for when work will begin. We are liaising with bereavement services to see exactly when it will be done.

"The tenders have gone out and come back and they are just being evaluated."

Vandalism

The fencing round the park was taken down years ago, but is set to return after appeals from nearby residents. Those living near the park and cemetery have complained of late-night drinking, arson attacks on the historic bandstand and vandalism.

It is hoped the fencing plan will block access to the park and cemetery at night and keep crime down.

A friends group has also been set up to protect the cemetery which has seen tombstones defaced and monuments damaged.

The group will receive an update about the railings at their next meeting in January, for which a date is yet to be set.

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Santa arrives in the woods this weekend

SANTA will take a ride through Warley Woods on Sunday and youngsters are invited to help him find his way.

Warley Woods Community Trust has organised the event which will see Father Christmas use a train to ride to his grotto at the Pavilion on Lightwoods Hill. Children are being asked to bring torches to light the route from 4 to 4.15pm before joining Santa for presents and mince pies.

St Hilda's Church Choir and members of Bearwood Baptist Church will be singing carols. There will be refreshments and stalls.

Centre offers help

A £3.7 million rehabilitation centre has opened in West Bromwich, creating 28 jobs.

The Macarthur Centre supports vulnerable people with long term mental health problems, such as bipolar disorder. The centre is offering treatment previously unavailable in the area.

Sandwell Mental Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust chief executive Karen Dowman said: "We are proud to be launching such a crucial service for people in the Black Country with long-term mental health issues. The Macarthur Centre is a state-of-the-art building where people can build up their self-confidence and develop their everyday life skills.

Closer

"It will provide care closer to home for vulnerable people, so they can make a full recovery and move back to living independently when they are ready."

The centre, at Heath Lane Hospital, offers patients a range of treatments and therapies.

New system for expenses 'idiotic,' says Warley MP

A SANDWELL MP has delivered a damning verdict of the new expenses regime which he claims has left him out of pocket for months.

Warley's John Spellar called it "an idiotic system, frankly designed to make Parliament the preserve of the rich".

He branded those behind the new online claims system as "red-tape obsessed bureaucrats".

Scores of MPs have complained of difficulties with the new system, run by the new watchdog, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

Mr Spellar was one of several MPs shown to have not made a single claim when details of the first tranche of expenses under the new rules were released for the period from May 7 to August 31, this year.

Summer

They were not paid because their claims were either rejected, filled in wrongly or claimed too late

Mr Spellar said that because the system was so "complex" and "time-consuming", he and others had left their claims to the summer.

This means they were processed at a later date and so were not reimbursed in the first quarter.

He said he had managed to catch-up on most of his claims. He could not recall how much he had clawed back but said the details would be made public in the next round of expenses disclosures.

Move to protect playing fields

A COMPANY is being set up to protect land owned by Sandwell schools from being sold off for redevelopment.

Sandwell Council is set to nominate four members to join a "Local Authority Controlled Company" which will protect playing fields and other school land for the future, even if schools are moved out of local authority control.

The council is ploughing ahead with plans after it was stung with an £11 million bill, effectively "buying back" it's own land to create the new Rowley Learning Campus. When further education colleges were taken out of local authority control in the late 1980s, the land went with them.

Sold off

Councillor Steve Eling Sandwell Council's finance boss said: "With so many of the further educations sites, bought with public money, sold off for housing in the 1980s we felt we had to act now to protect schools land in the future.

"Academies and foundation trust schools are now in a position where they could sell off their land in the same way if they wanted to.

"Sandwell Council sees this as a positive step to prevent this happening ."

Casino and hotel bid despite borough ban

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A £15 million casino development in Sandwell is set to be considered by planning chiefs.

Developer St Modwen has submitted plans to Sandwell Council for the project near the M5 in Oldbury.

Amy Culora, spokeswoman for the Rank Group, which is behind the plan, said the company was keen to start work as soon as it was given the go-ahead.

"We've moved forward by submitting the application and now we are looking forward to receiving feedback from the planning department," she said.

"Obviously this is a long process and it does take time but it will all be worth it in the end."

The council, meanwhile, is seeking, more information.

The new casino, hotel and office complex would be built on a triangle of land to the south side of the Birchley Island adjacent to the M5 slip road.

It would create 180 jobs – 120 in the casino, 80 of which would be full-time.

The office complex would create 35 jobs, and the new hotel would have openings for 20 jobs.

Scores more positions would also be created in the construction industry as the development is built.

The new casino would be a Grosvenor Casino and could be open as early as 2012.

Gambling

A blanket ban on casinos was introduced in Sandwell in 2006 because councillors feared that they might encourage gambling in an area of high deprivation.

However, Rank Group was awarded its licence five years ago, before the ban came into force.

The land is owned by Sandwell Council and St Modwen.

It's the final cut at Frankie's

Frank and Pauline Bland, pictured with grandson Flynn Reynolds at their hairdressing business, Frankie's in Birmingham road, Oldbury. The couple are retiring to spend more time with their three grandchildren

Hairdressing duo retire after 42 years at shop

A COUPLE who have enjoyed 42 years of marriage and business hand in hand are set to retire on Christmas Eve.

Frankie's Hairdressers in Birmingham Road, Oldbury, was opened by Pauline and Frank Bland in 1968, just after they got married.

Pauline, 62, said: "We're having our regular customers on Christmas Eve and then the shutters will come down for good. It's going to be strange not seeing the door swing open again."

The couple split the building into a barber shop and hairdresser's and lived in the flat above, but are now selling the property.

Mrs Bland learnt to cut hair at Dudley College and, over the years, has seen fashions and style change, and come back round again.

Frank has also seen a change in styles. When he started a man's haircut was very strictly cut, and he says his mentors would have gone mad at some of the cuts people ask for now.

They built up a large number of regulars when the shop originally opened, who have since brought their own families in to have a haircut.

Their two children went to university and, while they still live locally, decided against taking over the family business.

The couple said there was always a family feel to the shop, and are now looking forward to retiring and looking after their three grandchildren.

Pauline said: "There's always been a nice friendly atmosphere in the shop, and it felt like one big family, but we are going to be much more relaxed after Christmas."

She added that the secret to a successful hairdresser was being discreet. "You obviously have to adapt to new styles and be friendly, but you also need to be discreet and know when your customers want to do the talking."

Water jets and fountains plan as part of big revamp at park

A WATER jet play area will be developed in West Bromwich's Dartmouth Park as part of £6.3 million regeneration plans.

The development will include fountains and water jets. It is being proposed as part of improvements to the children's play area within the park.

A paddling pool at the park was closed in 1999 after becoming a magnet for vandals. The play area was installed in 2004 at a cost of £200,000. This was funded by Sandwell Council and the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

Now the council wants to bring water back to the play area without the health and safety issues surrounding the installation of a permanent paddling pool.

John Satchwell, project officer for Dartmouth Park said: "The new new water play facility is part of the ongoing restoration of the park.

Feature

"Water play has been a feature of Dartmouth Park since the first paddling pool was constructed in 1928.

"It is only in recently years, around 1999 that the pool was removed from the park's landscape to make way for the children's playground.

"The new water play area is a modern twist to this historical feature and will include a host of jets and streams that are activited via a person standing on a pressure pad. There will be no standing water on the site.

"Proposals are currently being drawn up and it is hoped that we can go out to tender by March 2011."

Officers said it is too early to say how much the development would cost. Funds will come from the £6.3 million funding pot set aside for the regeneration of the Victorian park.

A total of £4.4 million of the funding came from the Heritage Lottery Fund with £1.9 million also coming from Sandwell Council.

Wrong benefit claim due to 'ignorance'

A BENEFITS cheat wrongfully claimed almost £10,000 in state hand-outs after failing to declare that his wife was working, a court heard.

Baldev Singh started claiming income support after an injury at work forced him to give up his job, Warley magistrates were told. But the 59-year-old, of Bush Avenue, Smethick, admitted failing to notify the Department of Work and Pensions that his wife was working full time at a clothing factory. The total amount of the over-payment, made between November 2005 and November 2009, was £9,782.

Andrew Chowdhury, defending, said the charge did not involve dishonesty but rather naivety and ignorance. Singh was fined £160 and ordered to pay costs of £100.

Receivers called in at shopping centre

WEST Bromwich's Queens Square shopping centre is in receivership, after the building society set to finance a multi-million pound revamp pulled the plug.

The town centre complex was owned by the UK arm of developers Stockland, after its 2007 purchase of Scottish property firm Halladale. Its £70 million scheme to completely revamp the 1960s centre was set to be financed by Nationwide Building Society. However, it appointed receivers on the centre, leaving an uncertain future.

Under plans announced in 2006 the centre was due to be a modern European-style shopping centre.

Refurbish

Artist impressions released two years later showed a glass fronted shopping centre with 23 new big name high street stores. There were also plans to refurbish existing shop units and build 24 apartments along with an 850-space multi-storey car park.

Sandwell Council still owns the freehold of the centre and originally planned to invest at least £3 million from its capital programme.

The council says there are still plans for improvements, but not on the scale originally planned.

Councillor Ian Jones, Sandwell jobs and economy chief, said the council is in talks with potential new owners and is confident that work could still start next year.

Receivers Fairacre Properties Ltd confirmed it was working with partners including the council to rejuvenate the centre. Nationwide confirmed a receiver had been appointed.

HQ to be bulldozed

THE headquarters of the West Bromwich Building Society is set to be bulldozed and redeveloped when the company moves to a new home.

Developer Stoford has agreed to take on the site in High Street, West Bromwich,when the society moves to the town's new £75 million All Saints development by early 2012.

The plans are detailed in a report to a meeting of Sandwell Council's cabinet which was due to meet yesterday (Wednesday).

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Eco-friendly library will open soon

OLDBURY'S £6 million library and council offices will be handed over to the council at the end of this month.

The eco-friendly Jack Judge House, which will include the new Oldbury library and office space for 300 Sandwell Council staff , will emit just a seventh of the carbon used by the buildings it replaces.

The building is named after Jack Judge, the Oldbury-born songwriter who penned the music hall anthem It's a Long Way to Tipperary.

The library is on the ground floor of the new building and more than 300 staff who work for Sandwell Council's adult and community services will be based in offices on the ground floor and upstairs.

The impressive structure is being built by West Midlands-based construction company Morgan Sindall.

The high-tech design means the concrete floor slabs act like radiators to keep the building warm, solar panels are placed in the roof, energy efficient lighting, triple glazing and cavity wall insulation six times thicker than most houses.

Footballers help heart care unit

A FOOTBALL tournament in memory of a former council worker raised almost £1,500 for coronary care.

The fourth Shaun Fletcher Memorial Tournament saw eight teams from Sandwell Council compete at Tipton Sports Academy.

The men's tournament was won by a team made up of Sandwell Council staff from ICT, investigations and engineering. The ladies' tournament was won by a team from Sandwell Homes.

Mr Fletcher, a father, had worked for Sandwell Council for more than 20 years.

Collapsed

He collapsed while playing football in July 2007 aged 39,.

Last week, staff presented Shaun's father Fred with a cheque for £1,453 raised by the tournament. The money will be donated to the coronary care unit at Sandwell Hospital.

Councillor Mahboob Hussein congratulated winners.

Brass band to perform

PHOENIX West Midlands Brass Band will perform at a Christmas concert in Cradley Heath.

The band will be on stage with soloist Stephanie Lamplugh at the Cradley Heath Salvation Army base in Meredith Street on Saturday, December 18. The show will start at 7pm and tickets are available from the Open Door Cafe at the Salvation Army centre, or by calling 01384 568822.

All cash raised will go to the mayor's charities, the Alzheimer's Society and Macmillan Cancer Support.

Work to start on supermarket in new year

WORK is due to start on a £2.2 million Co-operative food store to be built in West Bromwich.

The site, which will create more than 60 jobs, is close to Hill Top Library, and work is scheduled to get under way in February. The store is due to open in September next year.

The 9,000-sq ft single-storey supermarket will be built by Midlands-based developers Stoford Retail at the site of a former car showroom and workshop, which has been closed for several years. The development will include 40 car parking spaces.

Midlands Co-operative Society Ltd is behind the plans, which were passed by Sandwell Council last month.

Carl Stacey, Director of Stoford Retail, said: "We are delighted that permission has been granted to build a new Co-operative food store at Hill Top and we are now going ahead with the tendering with a view to starting work early in the new year.

"The store will transform a long disused site, boost the local economy, and create new jobs in a major area earmarked for regeneration."

David Melhuish, development and facilities manager for Midlands Co-operative Society, said: "We are pleased that this project is getting off the ground. "The food store will provide the local community with a wide range of products for their everyday shopping needs."

The shop will be open between 6am and 11pm Monday to Saturday, 10am-4pm on Sundays and bank holidays.

It is the latest derelict site in the area to be brought back to use as a shop.

Wardens to patrol the streets at night

sandwellchronicle@expressandstar.co.uk

WARDENS are set to patrol the streets of Sandwell late at night in a bid to cut crime.

Borough safety bosses want a team of six wardens to target hotspot areas until 2am in a scheme that would cost £236,150 in its first year.

Currently warden patrols across Sandwell only run from 10am to 10pm, with incidents after 10pm dealt with by the police.

Sandwell's neighbourhoods chief, Councillor Derek Rowley, said: "We already have a pilot where we patrol between 6pm and 10pm in various problem areas."

Cllr Rowley added: "It has shown the number of alcohol confiscations go up, anti-social behaviour appears to be going down and customer satisfaction goes up.

"This late night patrol would be about targetting areas of anti-social behaviour. People would be able to ring a number and we are anticipating responding to them in about 20 minutes. If there is criminal activity it would be a matter for the police but general anti social-behaviour we can respond to.

"I have got to look at the report and if we can make other savings we will try to bring it in."

Proposals for the scheme are detailed in an interim report of Sandwell's select committee on "community safety and perceptions of crime" which was established in May.

The proposals were discussed by Sandwell's full council last week before a final report is completed next spring.

CCTV

The report states the committee would like to see a pilot trial of a mobile warden service with two senior wardens and four wardens to be deployed across the borough using information from neighbourhoods and the borough's CCTV control room with the aim of responding to incidents within 20 minutes.

The committee have also recommended that additional links be made between CCTV and uniformed patrolling services and has proposed a joining up of uniformed patrols, street, park and parking enforcement.

In Sandwell there are 21 street wardens, 38 car parking wardens and 10 park wardens.

Neither Wolverhampton City Council or Walsall Council have plans to extend or reduce the hours of its own wardens.

Borough bill for spy cameras is second highest after Brum

MORE than £5 million has been spent installing and operating CCTV cameras in Sandwell over the last three years, making it the second biggest spending authority on security in the country.

Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that Sandwell comes only second to Birmingham, which spent more than £10m.

The data, obtained by campaign group Big Brother Watch, shows that in Sandwell just over £4m was spent on staffing, while the rest went on installing CCTV and maintenance of the camera network.

The borough has spent millions more than its neighbour Dudley, which is number 149 on the list after spending £806,355.

South Staffordshire at 192nd spent £578,000, Wolverhampton was 199th spending £564,890, and Cannock Chase 221st after a spend of £445,724.

Walsall, Staffordshire, and Stafford Borough Council failed to respond to the request for information.

Sandwell safety bosses said cameras made people in the borough feel safer.

In the last three years, £601,733 was spent on installing equipment. This was spent in the last year on a central CCTV control room, replacing eight previous sites.

The cost of operation and maintenance was £250,692 last year.

Cut

It is estimated that that will be cut by up to half by centralisation.

Salaries, including pension liabilities was £1.306m for 2009-2010. It is also estimated that will be reduced by a third through centralisation of CCTV.

Big Brother Watch director Alex Deane, said: "Taxpayers will be scandalised to see their money being thrown away like this in the current economic climate."

Talented line-up

Students Taran Sangha, aged 15, Rhiann Willetts, 15, Alex Fogarty, 15, Claire Woodhouse, 16, Sophy Shillam, 13, Josh Singh, 16 and Alex Roper 16

YOUNGSTERS at a Tividale school will be taking to the stage for a fundraising talent show.

The Ormiston Sandwell Community Academy in Lower City Road, Tividale, is hosting its own talent show, We've Got It, in aid of Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's charity. It will be staged on Wednesday, December 15, by year 11 Btec Music students.

Josh Singh, a member of the music group, said: "When the season of goodwill is at its peak, we realise that not all are as fortunate as us and we decided to give all the proceeds to Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Tickets for the talent show are priced £2.50, available in advance from the school or on the door at the show, which starts at 7pm.

Mission church is in need of £100,000

A BLACK Country chapel which shut its doors eight months ago will need an estimated £100,000 in repairs to bring it back into use.

Services were last held at the St Andrew's Mission Church building on the Darlaston-Wednesbury border, last autumn.

No decision has been made by Lichfield Diocese over the future of the premises which had also been used by Kings Hill's Methodist congregation.

The church is the responsibility of new parish priest the Rev Tim Vasby-Burnie. He is also the vicar of St Bartholomew's in neighbouring Wednesbury.

Lichfield Diocese has held back from deciding whether to keep the Darlaston Road site or put it up for sale.

"We would need roughly £100,000 to repair the building and make it a good place to use for worship and other activities. Most of that would go on decorating the walls and ceiling," Mr Vasby-Burnie said.

"Having been vicar here for almost six months, I am discovering how much people have fond memories of St Andrew's and I am very grateful for the generous support they have given over the years.

Unknown

"St Andrew's was built as a mission church so that the people of Kings Hill might discover and enjoy the good news of Jesus. Times change, buildings get old, but our mission remains the same. The future of the building remains unknown, unless we can find £100,000."

St Andrew's Mission Church was built in 1893 at cost of £1,700. It had links to schools in the Kings Hill area and played a key role in the education of children in surrounding homes.

Dwindling numbers in recent years led to the closure of worship services in October 2009.

The building was being shared with Kings Hill Methodist congregation who have joined to Moxley Methodist Church.

Festive film night at theatre

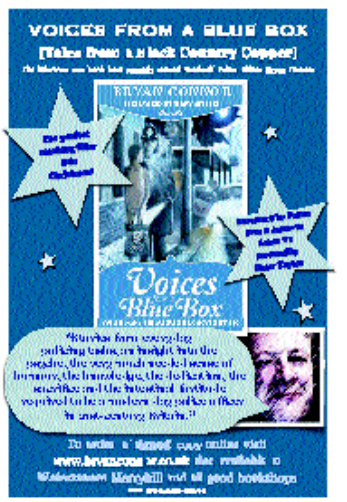
FILM screenings are going to take place twice a month at a Black Country theatre.

Oldbury Rep will host the movies at its main auditorium at the Barlow Theatre, Spring Walk, Langley, after buying new projection equipment.

The first screening on Saturday, December 11 will be the animated festive treat Disney's A Christmas Carol, starring Jim Carrey.

It starts at 7.30pm and tickets are £3.50. There is a bar, coffee shop and free parking.

Call the box office on (0121) 552 2761.



thechronicle

Drug factory illegal immigrants jailed

TWO Vietnamese illegal immigrants were found hiding on top of roller shutters when police raided a cannabis factory in the Black Country.

Police discovered more than 2,000 plants spread across six rooms, which would have yielded 75kg of the drug, when they searched the factory unit in Dudley Port.

Chung Truong, aged 32, and 20-year-old Hieu Hoang, who were smuggled into the country illegally, were arrested after police spotted them on top of roller shutters at the Anchor Way unit.

The pair, who had been promised legitimate work to pay off huge debts at home, were each locked up for two years at Wolverhampton Crown Court by a judge who told them they would be deported upon release.

Mr Howard Searle, prosecuting, said officers acting on a tip-off found the set-up on September 13.

He said: "Cannabis was growing in six rooms and there was a classic hydroponic set up with ventilation, high-intensity lightbulbs. Electricity was being abstracted illegally."

Both men admitted being involved.

Judge Rosalind Bush told the pair: "You were facilitating the earning of a great deal of money by criminals. This was cultivation on an industrial, very professional and very large scale.".

Benefit cheat got £40,000

A MOTHER-of-two from West Bromwich pocketed almost £40,000 in a benefit fraud.

Tiesha Campbell did not tell officials she had found work and continued to claim income support, housing and council tax benefit for almost 10 years before being discovered, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard. Prosecutor Mr Henry Davies told the court that the overpayment was £39,626.

Campbell, aged 30, from Walter Street, has paid back around £800 since January.

Mr Ben Williams, defending, said: "This involves a huge amount of money but it was made up of small sums accrued over a very long time."

Campbell, who had no previous convictions, admitted making false statements to obtain benefit.

Work

She received a 12-week sentence, suspended under supervision for a year with 200 hours of unpaid work.

Judge Rosalind Bush told her: "I accept your benefits claim was not originally fraudulent."

Newsagent is fined over rat-infested storeroom

A TIPTON newsagent, whose shop storeroom was infested by rodents and strewn with droppings, has been ordered to pay thousands of pounds in fines.

Mumtaz Saleem, who ran Fags and Mags on High Street, was found guilty in absence of five charges including stopping an environmental officer investigating his outdoor store room.

Parent company Princes Local Limited, of which Mr Saleem is a director, has to pay £21,858, after being found guilty of four charges.

The court found Princes Local Limited, trading as Fags and Mags, failed to ensure adequate processes were in place to control pests; that Princes Local Limited failed to ensure the premises were kept clean and in good condition; that Mumtaz Saleem obstructed an environmental health officer; and that Princes Local Limited failed to ensure adequate processes were in place to control pests in a storeroom and rear extension.

The company pleaded guilty to not maintaining hygiene in the store and in an indoor storeroom. Saleem had pleaded not guilty.

Mr Ben Mills, prosecuting on behalf of Sandwell Council, told Warley Magistrates how on April 2 last year environmental officers visited the store on High Street.

Mr Mills said: "They found dead rodents, mice and mice droppings everywhere. There were partly-eaten food packets, gnawed on by rodents, general dirt and filth."

The court heard evidence from senior environmental officer Clare Iceton, who visited the store.

Miss Iceton said she even found droppings on the top shelf of a display and dead mice stuck to a sticky board beneath a shelf of light bulbs.

Sewer

There were mice droppings inside a chiller behind a loose panel near its motor.

But when Miss Iceton went to inspect the outdoor storeroom, Saleem blocked her way saying it was a construction site and unsafe. He invited her back the next day.

The court heard an unfinished toilet in the indoor storeroom allowed rats to enter direct from the sewer.

Mr Mills said Rentokil had visited the store on March 9 last year and found major signs of a mouse infestation.

Saleem, aged 44, agreed with officers to close the shop after the inspection.

The court heard how Rentokil cleaned up the property after its closure to an acceptable standard for it to be reopened in April last year.

Saleem was fined £1,250 for obstructing Miss Iceton from making an inspection. He was fined £700 for each of the other charges and ordered to pay £2,500 towards court costs and a £15 victim surcharge.

Princes Local's total to be paid included £17,000 for four charges of breaching regulations, £4,843 costs and a £15 victim surcharge.

Decision is due later this month on centres

CONSULTATION with the public into plans to close four Sandwell care homes ended last week.

Under the plans being mooted by Sandwell Council, four homes will close, with 76 pensioners moved out.

Homes set for the axe are Grafton Lodge in Oldbury, Greenhaven Resource Centre in West Bromwich, John Dando Residential Centre in Great Barr and Glebefields Resource Centre in Tipton.

Decision

Responses from residents, their families and other interested parties are now being collated and a report will be produced by officers. This will be taken to the decision-making cabinet later this month, after which a decision will be made on their future.

If the plans are backed John Dando will be the first home to go, closing its doors in February next year with Grafton House next for the chop, in August.

Glebefields would then close in February 2012 and Greenhaven in August 2012.

Steps out for charity

LIBRARY staff raised £1,025 for two charities by walking from their place of work to the next nearest library and handing over a book.

Employees from 19 libraries clocked up 79,771 steps between them with the fundraiser, also aiming to show how items can be borrowed and returned to any library in the borough.

The money raised will go to the Cure Parkinson's Trust and The Alzheimer's Society. Staff held coffee mornings and ran a competition for people to guess the total amount of steps it took staff to walk between the libraries.

Substation that became drug den could be replaced by housing

Homes proposed for electric station site

A DERELICT electricity station in Oldbury, which has attacted vandals and drug addicts, could be turned into a site for new homes.

Plans have been submitted for the substation and land on Vicarage Road, to be turned into 13 family houses, by Cheshire-based Howard and Seddon Architects.

The site, near the Merrivale pub and backing on to the former Langley Hall, has been vacant for years. The building was broken into repeatedly and rubbish and syringes have been found inside.

The proposed houses will be a mixture of terraced and semi-detached homes with three bedrooms each, measuring up to two and a half storeys with 20 off-street parking spaces.

Councillor Paramjit Randhawa, of St Paul's ward, said: "The site has been used by fly-tippers for years, the substation has been broken into many times. Needles have been left by people taking drugs. It's been a problem site.

"It's a gateway site for St Paul's and anything that will improve that barren land will be welcome."

Retired salesman Jim Burton, of Vicarage Road, said: "For me the houses would be good news.

Enhance

"The land has been left for a long while. It would do away with the fly-tipping, I think it would be a good idea if the properties are up to standard to enhance the area."

A design and access statement submitted by architects on behalf of Golden Tree Financial Services Plc, said: "The development of the site will create a visually attractive, safe, accessible and functional environment which meets the needs of people. It also improves upon the existing derelict site which has been subject to vandalism and several years of fly tipping."

A low brick wall with railings would surround the site, with other parts protected by timber fencing.

If approved, the homes will replace the former brick-built switch room and substation.

Roads still the priority for business leaders

BUSINESS bossess are calling for more investment in roads as part of the plan for transport in the Black Country.

They have questioned the benefits of the Midland Metro extension and asked for details as to how a one-a-half mile extension will bring 1,300 jobs.

Transport authority Centro and the region's councils have unveiled their third local transport plan for keeping the region moving in 2026, known as LTP3. It intends to go ahead with three major extensions of the Midland Metro, despite not having been able to secure Government funding in the past 10 years.

A new tram line between Wednesbury and Brierley Hill would cost £268 million while another connecting Wolverhampton, Wednesfield, Willenhall, Walsall and Wednesbury would cost £419m. There are also hopes for an extension to Birmingham Airport. A further £31m loop of Wolverhampton city centre is still on the cards

So far the only backing from the Government is for a £127m extension of the existing track to cover one-and-a-half miles of Birmingham city centre. Centro believes that will bring 1,300 jobs because businesses will want to relocate due to the "connectivity" of the service to New Street station. But in a response to the 98-page document the Black Country Chamber of Commerce said that the strategy does not take enough account of road use.

Inadequate

Colin Leighfield, of its transport policy group, said: "We would suggest there should be a recognition that LTP3 must include efficient road systems for private transport as the primary means for moving people around. Business users complain the road network is inadequate to support prosperity.

He added: "We would like further detail and clarification of the Birmingham city centre Metro extension in terms of the £50m boost to the economy and the 1,300 sustainable new jobs".

It's the Baggies 'road' show

Pupils Adnan Mohammed, back left, and Olumide Adigun with Baggie Bird and, at the front, Sofia Islam, Ayesha Kauser, Thanya Akthar and Umar Khan

YOUNGSTERS formed a walking bus in Sandwell to highlight a road safety campaign.

West Bromwich Albion has teamed up with the Think! organisation to help children learn about road safety.

Albion mascot Baggie Bird led a walking bus with Sandwell road safety expert Steve Francis and pupils from Galton Valley Primary School in Smethwick, highlighting the best and worst places to cross a road.

Safety

Albion will also be using its after-school clubs and activities in schools and on match days to help educate children about road safety.

The club will work with 10 primary schools across Sandwell.

Anna Pincher, education and learning development manager at the West Bromwich Albion Foundation, said: "We've got lots of great activities in store for kids across Sandwell and are thrilled to be a part of this new Think! initiative."

City gig for a Motown legend

TAMLA Motown music legend Martha Reeves will be bringing her Vandellas to Birmingham venue the HMV Institute, in Digbeth, on Friday, December 17.

The 69-year-old veteran soul singer's hits include Dancing In The Streets, Nowhere to Run, Heat Wave and Jimmy Mack.

Tickets cost £18.50 in advance for the concert at HMV Institute's The Library room.

Call 0844 248 5037.

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From booze to good news and pints to pews

WORK is under way to turn one of the Black Country's most notorious pubs, the former London Apprentice, into a church.

The pub had become known as a trouble hotspot.

Worshippers at the Bethel United Church Of Jesus Christ bought the London Apprentice in Smethwick for £30,000 earlier this year.

The pub shut in March following an emergency closure order imposed days after two men suffered knife wounds. Police singled it out as a hotspot for guns and drugs and there were metal detectors to make sure customers were not carrying knives.

Cladding on the building has now been taken down and the bar has been ripped out, while grass outside the building has been trimmed and cleared of weeds.

Pastor Jacob Harriott, from Wolverhampton, said: "I am pleased with the work so far.

"I feel relief that it is slowly coming together. It may still look like a pub but people need to see beyond that.

Dream

"I have a dream. I can envisage what it will be like."

He added: "People in this area are happy about what is going on.

"Having a place where there was fighting and bloodshed and turning it into a place that brings peace to the community can only be a good thing."

The building, based in Soho Close, still needs to have plumbing, plastering and painting work done but it is hoped it can open early in the new year.

What was once the main drinking area is being split into two smaller rooms.

One of these will be used to hold services and the other will be available for community functions.

The London Apprentice sign at the front of the pub has been taken down but discolouring on the brick wall left by a Mitchells & Butlers logo is still visible.

For 35 years members of the church had been forced to hire school halls and community centres for serviices and functions.

Mr Harriott currently leads his Sunday service from a room at Akrill Memorial Methodist Church in Londonderry Lane.

Jacob Harriott outside the pub which is being transformed into a church

Refurbishment work takes place on the ceiling of what was the main bar area

George Sanders and Sandwell Mayor Pauline Hinton with, back, mayor's consort David Hinton, fundraisers Eloise Davidson and Roy Aldridge, store manager Jim Brice and Rotarian Michael Middleton

Festive sparkle

A CHRISTMAS tree at a supermarket in Sandwell is being decorated with stars in memory of people's loved ones.

Wednesbury Rotary Club has unveiled a tree of light at Morrisons in the town.

People are being asked to donate £5 in return for a star on which they can write the name of a friend or family member who has passed away.

Service

The scheme will run until Christmas Eve and it will be followed up next year by a service of remembrance.

All of the money raised will be split between Macmillan Cancer Support and SSAFA, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association.

Rotary Club secretary George Sanders said: "A number of people like to remember their loved ones in this way and it seems to generate a lot of community spirit.

" Last year, there were more than 130 and we raised £650 for charity."

Community work for brothel receptionist

A WOMAN who helped run a Black Country brothel has avoided a prison sentence after a judge said he was not presiding over a "court of morals".

Married Marisa Paterson was the first person police saw when they raided the shop, called Fun Place, on Bearwood Road, Bearwood.

Paterson admitted working as a maid and receptionist, taking phone calls and bookings.

Wolverhampton Crown Court heard that she would greet customers and arrange rooms for customers and girls. Customers would then pay the girls and Paterson, aged 39, of Wingfoot Avenue, Low Hill, Wolverhampton, would receive tips.

Paterson, who also admitted updating the brothel's website, pleaded guilty to assisting in the management of a brothel.

A investigation is under way to see what financial gain Paterson made from her employment.

Judge Nicholas Webb said: "This is not a court of morals, it's a court of law. What you did was illegal, but this is not a case where there is any evidence that you took a guiding, or by any stretch of the imagination, a leading role in the management of this brothel."

He gave Paterson a community order and ordered her to do 80 hours of unpaid work.

Mr Gurdeep Garcha, defending, said she was now hoping to help her husband run a business.

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Turkey trot for hospice cash

A CHARITY fun run and a traditional Christmas fair will be held during a winter wonderland event at Barr Beacon.

Father Christmas will be the guest of honour at Beacon Wonderland on December 11. The free admission event will run from 11am until 4pm and will coincide with the 5K Turkey Trot in aid of Walsall Hospice.

As well as the fun run, there will be a Christmas fair at nearby Collingwood Centre in Pheasey, featuring gifts, crafts and other festive bargains. .

Aside from raising money for the Mayor of Walsall's Charity Appeal, which supports Walsall Hospice and various charities for disadvantaged youngsters , it is hoped the event will raise the profile of Barr Beacon's Heritage Lottery Fund restoration project.

Awareness

Walsall councillor Adrian Andrew, Barr Beacon Trust chairman, said: "Beacon Wonderland is a fantastic way to raise awareness of this important site while allowing visitors the chance to enjoy some old-fashioned Christmas cheer and support Walsall Hospice."

The Turkey Trot will start from Barr Beacon war memorial at 11.30am. Entry details are available by calling 01922 423578.

Rachel Riddler with Jo Ellis and Cheryl Bradburne, who are all from Walsall Hospice, getting ready for the Walsall Hospice Turkey Trot at Barr Beacon

Long-serving Bill is honorary alderman

ONE of Sandwell's longest serving councillors has been confirmed as the borough's newest honorary alderman. The title was confirmed on Bill Archer at an extraordinary meeting of the council last week.

Mr Archer represented Wednesbury North for 35 years until his recent retirement. He served as Mayor in 2005/2006 and raised a record amount of money – £35,500 – for his chosen charities Prostate Cancer and Guide Dogs for the Blind. Mr Archer's name will now be added to the roll of honorary aldermen in the council chamber.

Thrilled

He said: "I am absolutely thrilled to be given this honour. It enables me to keep in touch with things that are going on at the council and to keep seeing some of the many friends I have made over the years. I can honestly say I have enjoyed every minute serving the people of Wednesbury."

Sandwell Council leader Cllr Darren Cooper and leader of the Conservative group Cllr Ray Nock both proposed Mr Archer be made an honorary alderman.

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Friends Madison Tranter and Katie Baker, both eight, and from Wednesbury, put their pomanders up to help decorate the interior of the manor

Deck the hall

VISITORS to West Bromwich's Grade I listed Manor House were invited to take a step back in time to help decorate its Great Hall as it would have been in years gone by.

The Deck the Halls event at the 13th Century Manor House last week saw swathes of holly, ivy and mistletoe put up. Guests were also invited to make traditional decorations, including pomanders and gingerbread tree ornaments. Rachel Smith, development officer at the Manor House, said: "In all around 70 people came to help us decorate the Manor House. The hall is looking beautiful and smelling amazing."

OAP will use funeral cash to pay court

A PENSIONER who cheated taxpayers out of £34,000 in benefits has been ordered to pay the costs of her prosecution out of money she was saving for her funeral.

Judge Michael Challinor ignored pleas to allow Shanta Pallan to keep the £3,000.

The 60-year-old, who suffers from ill health, said she needed it to cover the cost of her funeral.

Pallan lied to benefits bosses for more than six years by telling them she was not related to her landlady.

In fact, her landlady was her sister, who had bought the property at Arthur House Close, Smethwick, just three days before Pallan's first benefits claim.

Pallan also failed to notify benefits bosses when she was paid £4,000 compensation after suffering whiplash in a car crash in 2004.

She put that money, along with £1,000 from her bank account, into an ISA, but did not declare either sum of money, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard lastweek. By 2007, the money had grown to £6,250.

Pallan, now of Latimer Gardens, Edgbaston, admitted 13 charges of benefits fraud. She was overpaid £34,087 in housing benefit and £244 of council tax benefit. Pallan has now repaid the council tax figure but owes £34,030 in housing tax benefit, which she is paying back at £52 per month.

Judge Michael Challinor said he had "sympathy for the reason you want to keep your savings". But he ordered her to pay £1,688 costs and gave her a nine month prison sentence, suspended for 18 months, and ordered her to be supervised for 18 months.

Plea for organists

BLACKHEATH Organ, Keyboard and Musical Society is on the lookout for new members.

The society, which holds regular meeting, recitals, and charity shows meets on the second Monday of every month at Rowley Regis Conservative Club in Hawn Lane. Meetings start at 7.30pm.

Malcolm Jones, spokesman for the club, said: "We are looking for new members, whether they want to learn, play, or just listen. Call on 0121 4397260.

The magnificent seven

A TEAM of young people from the Prince's Trust are overhauling a churchyard and hall in Wednesbury,

The seven-strong team, from across the Sandwell and Walsall area has started work at St Bartholomew's as part of a 12-week personal development course.

The youngsters, all aged between 17 and 23 have spent two weeks fundraising for materials and moved onto the site at the church last week to carry out a fortnight of improvement works.

The team raised £220, all of which is being spent on the upgrade.

Project

Tracey Powell, who is team leader for the group of youngsters, based at Wednesbury fire station, said: "The group selected the church as a deserving project and carried out a range of fundraising events – including a charity car wash and chest wax – to raise cash for materials."

James Evans, back left, Rev Tim Vasby-Burnie, Ryan Lynn and Onkar Mahgara with, front, Bryannie Hardy, Dan Scott, Nicky Read and Tracey Powell

Dumped gerbil is rescued

A TINY gerbil, abandoned in a sealed lunchbox at a West Bromwich shopping centre, has been given a new home at a Birmingham animal centre.

Little Geoff, as he has been named by staff at the RSPCA, was saved after being discovered in the box by Queens Square security guard Luke Taylor.

Mr Taylor said: "I was doing my normal patrols when I came across the lunch box sitting on a ledge.

"I thought it was probably empty so couldn't believe my eyes when I found a gerbil in it.

I hung around for a few minutes thinking someone might have left him and was coming back to collect but no-one appeared.

"As soon as I opened it up to put some water in he jumped out and I had a bit of a game getting him contained again."

Anyone interested in providing a home for Geoffthe gerbil can call the RSPCA on 0300 1230754.

Oak House in £2m plan for revamp

AN HISTORIC house in Sandwell is set to undergo a £2 million revamp in a bid to attract an extra 30,000 visitors a year.

The project will see the refurbishment of 16th century Oak House in West Bromwich and will include the restoration of its derelict barns and a new education centre.

It will also include a visitor reception, offices, toilets, a shop and other facilities.

The barns have been described as fundamental to the future success of the Oak Road-based museum.

Sandwell Council is set to plough £1m into the scheme with a further £1m being sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Classroom

Keith Heyes, head of cultural services at Sandwell Council, said: "Next door to the Oak House we have always had two 16th century barns which are listed, but we have never had a use for them. We now have a £2m scheme to bring them into use for visitor facilities, classroom facilities and meeting rooms.

"We are now at the point where we are going into planning consent and the design process to bring the barns into use.

"That scheme comes to fruition in two years. At the moment they are redundant and subject to anti-social behaviour and attract litter."

Kelvin Attwell, from Smethwick Industrial Services, places the canal pump

Pump returns home

A CANAL pump has been returned to its Oldbury home after 20 years.

The pump that served the Titford Canal was used to raise water when it was installed in the 1960s. However, when the Titford Pumphouse in Engine Street became disused in the late 1990s the pump was moved to Ellesmere Port Boat Museum.

It has now undergone an extensive refurbishment by volunteers at Hawne Basin in Halesowen and has been returned to its home by the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society.

Ivor Caplan, secretary of the society, said the pump will remain on the wharf at the pumphouse as a static display showing its working parts.

Schools face a baby boom

PRIMARY schools across the Black Country are being forced to squeeze in more pupils as councils struggle with the sudden jump in pupil numbers.

Twenty schools across Sandwell, Walsall, Kidderminster and Staffordshire will have to become super primaries by creating additional places from September next year. Local authorities are putting in place plans to deal with the increase in pupil numbers by expanding existing schools.

Five primary schools in Sandwell – Tameside Primary, Wednesbury; Uplands Manor, Smethwick; Shireland Hall, Smethwick; Joseph Turner and Glebefields, Tipton – will be creating additional places. Shireland Hall has already started taking on extra pupils.

'I am no parasite' says X Factor's Wagner

WILDCARD X Factor contestant Wagner Carrilho, voted off the top TV talent show the weekend before last, has revealed he has asked to be taken off benefits.

The controversial singer, who used to run martial arts classes in Sandwell, had faced allegations that he should not have been claiming benefits whilst appearing, singing and dancing on the top-rated show.

He says that he knows that he will be getting paid from touring and various shows as a result of him finding fame on The X Factor, and said he didn't want people to view him as a "parasite".

Sits

"The reason I went on the show was because I didn't want to be on benefits," said the Brazil-born Pensnett resident.

"I didn't want to be a parasite that sits around and doesn't work.

"I voluntarily phoned the Department for Work and Pensions and asked not to be on benefits any more. My claim has been stopped.

"I will be getting paid from The X Factor."

Choir concert

WARLEY Male Choir hold their Carols 'n' Brass Christmas concert with guests from Langley Band on Saturday, December 18, at Quinton Methodist Church from 7pm. Tickets £5.

Court fight looming in bid to modernise secondary schools

A COURT battle to try to save Sandwell secondary schools' modernisation programme will be thrashed out in the new year.

A five-day hearing into the Government's decision to axe funding for the transformation of nine schools will take place in January.

Sandwell Council and five other authorities will seek a judicial review to challenge the decision at the Royal Courts of Justice.

If they are successful, a review will follow in the hope the Government's decision could be overturned.

The coalition Government sparked fury in July by announcing all of Sandwell's Building Schools for the Future projects could go ahead but then revealing nine projects had actually been cancelled, with the authority losing £138 million in funding.

No choice

Council Leader Councillor Darren Cooper has held face-to-face meetings with Education Secretary Michael Gove urging him to reprieve the school plans.

"We do not want to take legal action but we have left with no choice by the Government's decision," said Councillor Cooper today.

"If we can get it changed it will be money well spent."

The schools which lost funding are Bristnall Hall, Heathfield, Manor and Menzies, The Meadows, Perryfields, Stuart Bathurst, Tividale and Wood Green.

Tesco store fears put freeze on market fees

A £200 million Tesco in West Bromwich could have such a devastating impact on market stalls that Sandwell Council bosses are set to back plans to freeze the stall fees next year to offset potential problems.

Officers fear small traders could be forced out of business by the development coming to New Street, transforming the town centre.

A report to be discussed at a meeting tomorrow (Friday) states: "Trading conditions in the borough continue to be very challenging, mainly due to nationally prevailing economic conditions.

"In addition however it is anticipated that West Bromwich will suffer major disruption over the coming years due to the pending town centre regeneration projects, adding to the difficulties retailers in the town centre face."

The report says a fees freeze is the best way to protect traders.

Monthly

The monthly fee for a stall in West Bromwich's market hall is £79.50, with regular traders in the open market paying between £14.30 and £30.05 a day.

Mary Docker, a Conservative Councillor and a trader at Blackheath Market said: "Freezing the charges seems like a good idea."

The scheme will bring a 144,236 sq ft Tesco store and other retail and leisure space. There will also be a hotel, additional car parking, more shops and a new Northern Ringway.

Work is to start on the road early next year.

Victim of crash named

THE victim of a fatal road traffic accident in Sutton Coldfield on Sunday was 22-year-old Scott Bennett, from Boldmere.

He received fatal injuries after the car he was travelling in was involved in a collision with another car in the early hours of Sunday morning on Birmingham Road near to the junction with Maney Hill Road. He was a passenger in a bronze Seat Leon involved in a collision with a black taxi cab.

A man, aged 23, has been was arrested on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving. He has been released on bail pending further enquiries.

Witnesses are asked to call the collision investigation unit at Aston police station on 0121 322 6098 or crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

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thechronicle

Big hats and even bigger baby carriages were fashionable in 1912

March 2, 1924, and the timeless treat of sledging at snowy Warley Woods

A Henry J Carless postcard shows the neat rose garden in about 1908

Woods a wonderland to city families since 1906

Children in Warley Woods raise money to build military aircraft during World War One

A NEW book that showcases historical images of a Black Country beauty spot has been published.

The postcard and photograph book called Vintage Images of Warley Woods, Smethwick, has been published by the Warley Woods Community Trust.

The book contains 84 images including many of the Abbey, the fountains and bandstand, as well as of people who are important to the park's history and golfing heritage.

Many of the postcards featured in the book were photographs taken by Henry J Carless, of 5, Wigorn Road, Bearwood, from the time when Warley Woods opened to the public who wanted a day out from the urban sprawl of Birmingham and Smethwick in 1906.

Viv Cole, Warley Woods Community Trust manager, said: "It is really exciting.

"Many people are fascinated by the history of the park and it is great that we are able to share with them photographs that they will have never seen before.

Received

"Our first book was well received and we think this new one will be really popular too."

● Vintage Images of Warley Woods, Smethwick can be bought from the pavilion shop at Lightwoods Hill, priced £5.99. For more details, call 0121 429 2440.

A pre-1914 park policeman

Park "super" Mr Bretherick sprays glasshouse pests

The south entrance to the tearoom and a peacock in July 1912, in the park's heyday

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thechronicle COMPETITION

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SHOPPERS are in for a treat thanks to local low price department store The Original Factory Shop, which opened a new outlet in Walsall on December 4.

To celebrate the store opening and as an extra special treat for shoppers this Christmas, we've teamed up with The Chronicles to offer readers the chance to win a share of £500 to spend in the new store, which is located at 5/6 Lichfield Road, Walsall Wood.

One lucky winner will get a "shoptastic" £100 of The Original Factory Shop vouchers as a first prize.

There will be four lots of £50 vouchers up for grabs as 2nd prizes and 10 runners-up will each receive £20 gift vouchers to spend.

With the fantastic prices in store you can be sure of your prize money going a long way.

Plus, with Christmas just around the corner you'll be able to pick a trolley full of decorations and gifts perfect for all the family at stunning prices.

The Original Factory Shop Walsall Wood brings an extensive range of men's, ladies' and children's fashions, as well as homewares, electricals and toiletries, including a large selection of branded goods, to the town.

To be in with a chance of winning one of these prizes please answer the following question:

Q. Where is the new store located?

Please send your answers on a postcard to The Chronicles Factory Competition, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton. WV1 1ES.

Usual competition terms and conditions apply. All prizes will be in the form of gift vouchers. There is no cash alternative.

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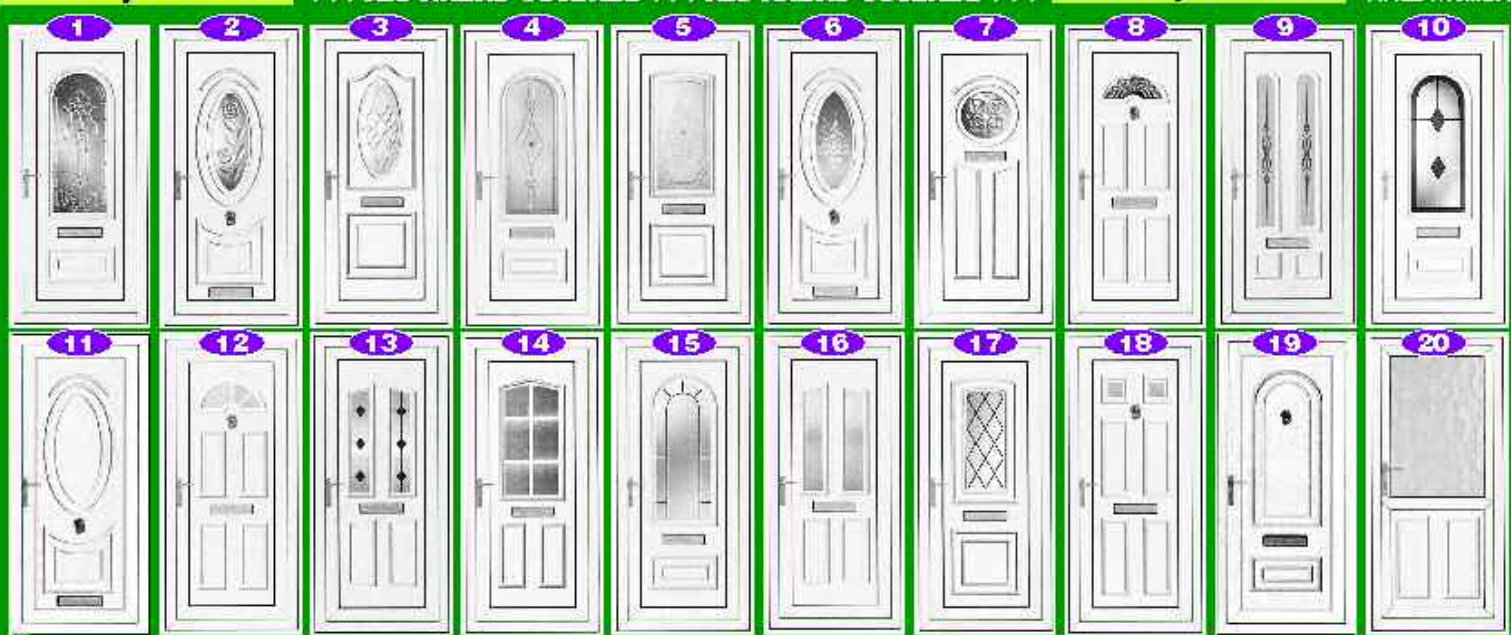

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IF you are looking for something different for the festive season and want something that the stars go for check out IDOL 7 which has just been launched exclusively at New Look.

An exploration of different materials, blends and silhouettes, the seventh collection by IDOL was inspired by medieval figures, think Joan of Arc and knights colliding with Blade Runner.

The result is a futuristic-feeling collection featuring lots of chain-mail, oversized tunics, sexy leather dresses with don't-mess-with-me studding and bold, graphic dresses with chain detailing and geometric belts reminiscent of corsets.

To soften the look, the range also includes draped jersey tunics, T-shirt dresses and slouchy suedette dresses with hoods.

An 80ies-style Aviator jacket and skinny jeans round up the essential rock chic wardrobe, accessorised with wing rings, foxy foot wear and contemporary cuffs.

IDOL has quickly become a firm favourite with celebs across the globe from Beyonce, Fergie, Lourdes, Dannii Minogue, Fearne Cotton and Lindsay Lohan.

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IT'S only November so no need to panic yet but we all have that annoying friend who announces that she has not only bought all her Christmas presents but has already wrapped them and hidden them away. You can go off people!

One way to wipe that smile of their face to go one better and do your shopping from the comfort of your armchair, either by catalogue or online and then just wait until it is delivered to your door. Who wants to lug back heavy bags after fighting through queues of shoppers. Yes, there may be some late bargains but is it worth the hassle?

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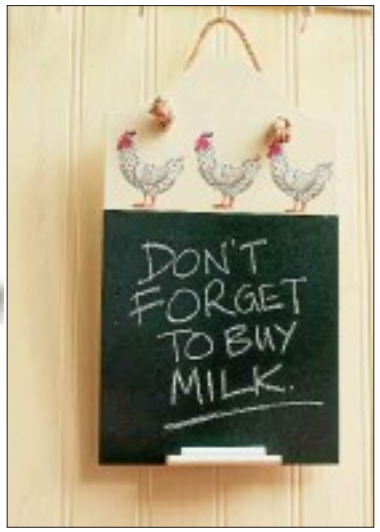

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TECHNOLOGY

thechronicle

Way to join the eBook revolution on a budget

THE BookBox from View Quest is a great budget eBook reader for those who don't want to fork out for one of the more expensive electronic readers or tablets.

It also doubles as a media centre, able to play videos, display photos and play music.

It's main task, displaying eBooks, is handled well. The five inch high-resolution backlit display with its anti-glare TFT screen can be read in bright sunshine or darkness with adjustable brightness, background and text colours.

There are the bookmarking, auto flip, zoom and screen rotation features that you would expect. The discrete button control system is easy to use with on-screen guides.

Video

All mainstream eBook formats are applicable, including Adobe DRM eBooks now widely available to download, and such everyday formats as PDF, ePub, TXT and HMTL. Graphic novels, comics and PDF brochures look particularly impressive.

The video, photo and music functions are easy to use with a nice crisp video image. All the major video formats are catered for including avi, wmv, mp4, mov, xvid and divx.

You have to pop on a pair of phones for sound and a background music function allows you to listen to tunes whilst reading.

The BookBox has a rubberized case which gives it nice hand feel and comes with a reasonably generous 2GB of internal memory (enough for thousands of eBooks).

There is also a slot for a SD/SDHC/MMC memory card for those who want to take lots of videos or a few libraries' worth of entertainment around with them.

Battery life is around six hours for reading and 20 hours for listening to music.

Content can be added by connecting the BookBox via the supplied USB cable to a PC for drag and drop, which can also be used to charge the device.

An AC adapter and leather-look black carry case are included.

As for the cons, you must press a button to rotate the images between portrait and landscape rather than the view shifting automatically, the screen is not touch sensitive and there are no speakers. But these are functions you would associate with far more expensive gadgets than the China-made BookBox, which is available for under £100.

HMV have it online at the time of writing for £79.99 though it will cost more in store.

Leon Burakowski

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There are two Italian style espresso cups included too.

The recommended retail price is £169 but you can find this machine widely available for under £100 at independent cook shops and department stores, and online.

For a list of stockists call Judge Cookware on 0117 940 0000.

Go on a PSP monster hunt

MONSTER hunting game Invizimals Shadowzone (7) and the cute EyePet (3) are now available, on their own or bundled with a PSP camera for fans of the handheld Sony games console.

Plugging the camera into your PSP, as well as adding camera functionality, turns the machine into a monster detector in the latest Invizimals game, which combines elements of Pokemon and The Spiderwick Chronicles. Shadowzone adds new monsters for the collectors.

Meanwhile, PS3 hit the EyePet is monkey-like virtual pet who you can bring to your home via the PSP-camera set up.

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GAMES

thechronicle

It's absolutely super, Sonic

Round-up of the latest Wii games

SONIC COLOURS (3, SEGA)

RAINBOW coloured high-speed heaven for fans of the blue hedgehog. Switching between 3D and classic 2D side-strolling style, this turbo-charged race through Eggman's incredible interstellar amusement park is one heck of a ride.

You can dash, jump, double jump, spin and slide, as you free the ghost-like wisps before Eggman can get his greedy hands on them. This is a real return to form for the blue blur, it's certainly super Sonic.

BATMAN: THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD. THE VIDEOGAME (12, WARNER BROS)

The animated version of the Caped Crusader stars, with Robin, in a good old fashioned side-scrolling beat-up-the-bad-guys game. The cartoon graphics are right for the subject matter as Batman and Robin take on a variety of super-villains with the help of a posse of super helpers from the world of DC comics.

Batman can call on help from The Flash, Aquaman and others as he battles his way through Gotham City, London, Science Island and even an alien planet. Various super gadgets can be unlocked and the Wii can link up with the DS version involving the character Bat-Mite. Wham! and kapow! fun.

SCOOBY-DOO AND THE SPOOKY SWAMP (7, WARNER BROS)

Play as Scooby, Shaggy or any of the Mystery Inc characters in this undemanding but fun game based on the long-running cartoon series.

In this new adventure the gang encounter a mysterious swamp girl cooking up a brew in her cauldron and, to find out what she's up to, they have to face creepy monsters, collect clues and solve puzzles. The character voices are spot on, the spooky music is excellent and the animation decent but it could have done without the canned laughter. Co-op mode means friends and family can drop into the game at any stage to help out.

MONOPOLY STREETS (3, EA)

Play on the Classic board or a 3D version City version of it, populated by your own home-made Miis, as the vintage family board game celebrates its 75th birthday with a revamp for the Wii.

You can play the regular Monopoly rules or choose one of the variants, or even edit the rules to suit your own style. There's no leaping about, you hold the Wiimote side-on as a game control pad. And if you haven't played a console game version of Monopoly before, it is enjoyable to see those familiar tokens burst into animated life.

TRUTH OR LIES (12, THQ)

This is Truth or Dare without the dare. You require a microphone for this game and start by giving truthful answers and then lies so the machine can calibrate your tone and from then on judge whether or not you're telling the truth. Nice idea but lie detectors are notoriously unreliable and this game is no different. It also features an annoying announcer. Why is a console game required at all when this sort of thing is often played by friends spinning a bottle (usually one they emptied earlier) and ends in tears when someone is a little too honest. **Leon Burakowski**

Eye-popping candy-coloured graphics as you join Sonic for a wild ride through an interstellar theme park in Sonic Colours

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thechronicle

Who's a popular gift choice at Christmas

DOCTOR Who shows no signs of losing its phenomenal appeal.

Some feared that the replacement of the hugely popular David Tennant by the younger Matt Smith as the Timelord might dent the Doctor's appeal. However, the enthusiastic Smith has energised the role as the (official) 11th Doctor and the BBCTV sci-fi series that started 47 years ago is as popular as ever.

The BBC has lots of spin-off merchandise that will be filling the stockings of the nation's young Whovians this Christmas.

BBC Children's Books is at the forefront. **Doctor Who: The Secrets of the TARDIS (£14.99)** comes complete with a sonic screwdriver, which beams a UV light for finding messages written in invisible ink. With it, young fans can shine a light into the database of the Doctor's extraordinary 'Time And Relative Dimensions In Space' machine, containing facts and stats on 170 alien creatures and worlds.

Doctor Who: The Official Annual 2011 (£7.99) will fly off the shelves this festive season. It puts the emphasis on the most recent series, the first full one with the 11th Doctor, and contains a new story plus comics, puzzles and lots of pictures.

More on the actor who has won British TV's most coveted role can be found in **The Eleventh Doctor: Matt Smith (£6.99)**.

Long time fans will enjoy the highly detailed **Doctor Who Companion Compendium (£6.99)**, a treasure trove of the time traveller's trivia, including how to spell Doctor in Latin, Russian and Dalek. It's everything you're going to need to know if you ever hitch a lift in the TARDIS, including what happened to all the previous companions. **Doctor Who: TARDIS Traveller (£8.99)** is shaped like the famous craft and like it (and, indeed, all books) is bigger on the inside than out.

BBC Children's Books also has a series of **Decide Your Destiny** paperbacks (£5.99 each) in which your choices determine the direction of the story, enhanced by material online at www.doctorwhochildrensbooks.co.uk. Join the 11th Doctor and get between giant insects and the formidable space police in **Judoon Monsoon**, take on werewolves in **Empire of the Wolf**, take on giant crabs in **Claws of the Macra** or face the Sycorax in **The Coldest War**.

Tom Baker

Meanwhile, the fourth Doctor can be heard in a series of new linked adventures from AudioGO, the new name for BBC Audio Books.

Tom Baker is in fine form in the **Demon Quest** series, new adventures featuring the flamboyant Doctor along with his companions grumpy housekeeper Mrs Wibbsey and old friend Mike Yates.

Sometimes a little too whimsical for their own good, Paul Magrs' stories will have more appeal for nostalgic Whovians than the new generation.

The individual titles (£9.99) are, in order, **The Relics of Time, The Demon of Paris, A Shard of Ice, Starfall** and **Sepulchre**. They follow last year's popular **Hornets' Nest** series.

The audiobooks are available on CD or to download from www.bbcaudiozone.com.

Leon Burakowski

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the pulse

There is nothing like a dame

3D magic comes to Wolverhampton this festive season when an animated genie will be among the stars of the Grand's pantomime, Aladdin, alongside top panto dame Christopher Biggins.

Rocks, spiders and a head-spinning genie come flying towards the audience in hi-tech special effects in the show from panto production house Qdos, which will be staged at the Grand from Saturday, December 11, to January 30.

Former 'King of the Jungle' Biggins and hip comedy ventriloquist Paul Zerdin will ensure lots of chuckles during the city's big Christmas show but the biggest wow factor will come when audiences put on the special glasses issued by the usherettes.

"It's going to be a spectacular pantomime," says Biggins.

See interview with Christopher Biggins on page 30

YOUR EIGHT-PAGE ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE AND WEEK'S TV VIEWING

Sophie Ellis-Bextor is going back on tour - interview – page 25

Glenn's homage to home – page 30

Clary doing a turn again with panto virgin Joan

Joan Collins – debut

DICK Whittington hits the stage at Birmingham Hippodrome this festive season starring Joan Collins – in her panto debut – and Julian Clary, who began his comedy career under the name 'The Joan Collins Fan Club'.

Also appearing in the star-studded show will be Walsall-born Hi-De-Hi star Jeffrey Holland as the Dame, and actor Nigel Havers (as King Rat) who recently quit the jungle by storming off TV show I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!

Top of the bill will be glamorous former Dynasty star Joan Collins, who will be the wicked Queen Rat. Keith Harris and Orville the Duck play the rat catchers.

Julian Clary, who will be returning to the Hippodrome to play The Spirit of the Bells, said: "This is probably the biggest and most lavish pantomime I have ever been involved in."

Dick Whittington opens on Saturday, December 18, and runs until January 30.

The Pulse is taking a Christmas break but will be back in the New Year

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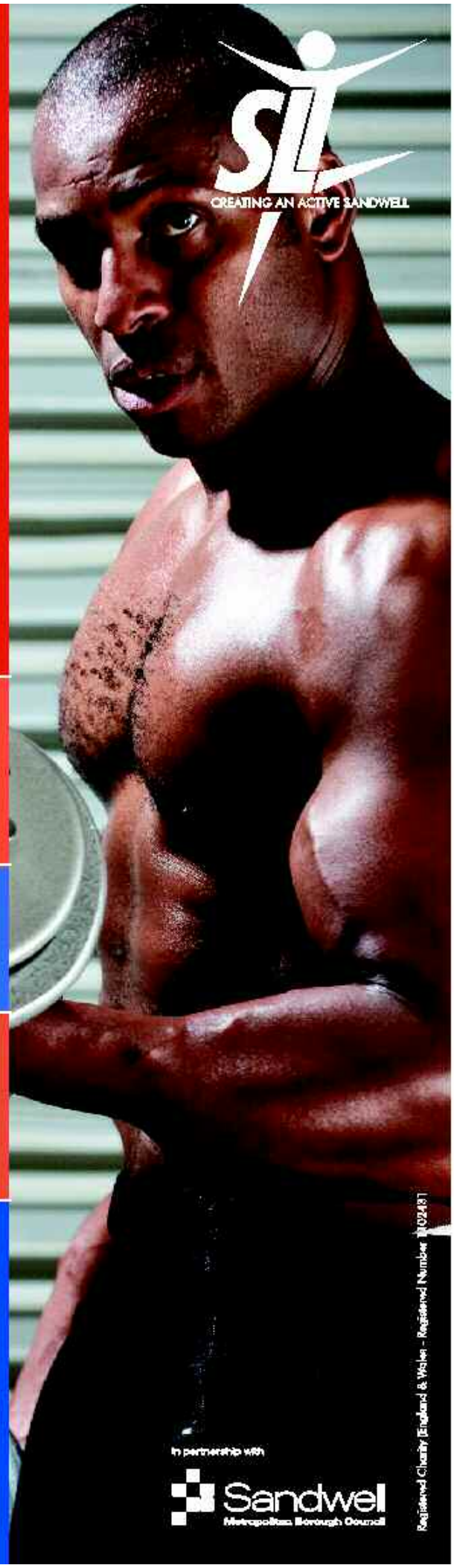

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BBC1

Breakfast. Saturday Kitchen Live. Hugh's Kitchen (P) BBC News; Regional News; Weather. Football Focus. Inside Sport. The Marion Jones Story (P) Live Snooker: UK Championship. The opening session of the second semi-final. First Score. BBC News; Regional News; Weather. The Impressions Show with Christian and Stephenson. More celebrity parodies, with Jon Culshaw and Debra Stephenson (R)

Strictly Come Dancing. The live results show, complete in the second semi-final.

Third Degree – Celebrity Special. Richard Hammond presents the film of two celebrity episodes. (R)

The Rolling of Luxury. Revealing musical parodies. Weather.

Crossroads. Jeff feels bad against unsympathetic jogging teacher Carl Hamilton.

The Weakest Link. Tony Robinson moves hoped in the 24-hour news cycle.

BBC News; Weather.

Match of the Day. Gary Lineker presents highlights of today's Premier League clashes, including Newcastle United v Liverpool and Aston Villa v West Bromwich Albion.

The Football League Show. Highlights of today's Championship, League One and League Two fixtures. Weather.

BBC News

BBC2

Breakfast. BBC Breakfast. The Cut. BBC Switch. The Sessions (P) BBC Outlook. The Sessions (R) BBC Switch. The 2.10 Show. BBC Switch. Rewarded. The Sports Hub (R) Film: The Big Green (1995) Drama, starring Victor Mature. Live Snooker: UK Championship. Further coverage of the opening session of the second semi-final. Dodo Array (R)

Holiday Scotland's Live Escape. Here Scotland's top hotels and attractions could be the ultimate prize. Lorraine Kelly presents.

Live Snooker: UK Championship. Hazel Irvine presents coverage of the second and concluding session of the second semi-final of the snooker championship at the Telford International Centre.

Have I Got a Bit More Breaker for You. Miranda Hart hosts an extended version of the current affairs quiz.

Qi XL. With Clive Anderson, Dara O Briain and Jimmy Carr. (R)

The Fly. Filmed at the Angel Inn at Helton in North Yorkshire. Last in the series. (R)

Dom O'Brien's Live at the Theatre Royal. The finale of the comedian's 200 shows of the UK and Ireland (R)

ITV1

GTV. The Polly Gale Show. Toonami. The Cool Stuff Collective. Planet Sketch. (R) The Planet's Funniest Animals (R) The Crocodile Hunter Diaries. (R) The Morning Show by Weather. Regional Programmes. Yo Ho Ho Green Pirates! (R) Westbeat Best Dance Moments. (R) Film: Step Up. (2006) Premiere. Mixed romance, with Channing Tatum and Jenna Dewan. Film: Up, Up. (1997) Comedy, starring Jim Carrey. Regional Programmes. ITV News; Weather.

Take Me Out. The boy band perform their hits in front of an invited audience – and along with Lipps Inc. They also sing an unexpected Beatles number. Hosted by Paul O'Grady.

The 11 Rules. The first of a thrilling new series, which is drawn from 15 of the best of the live studio sports, complete in part one of the 11 Dan Hart O'Leary presents.

Take Me Out. More polka. Dating game, hosted by Paddy McGuinness.

FILM: Bridget Jones's The Edge of Reason. (2004) Romantic comedy sequel, with Renée Zellweger and Colin Firth.

ITV News; Weather.

FILM: Bridget Jones's The Edge of Reason. (2004) Concluded.

Channel 4

The Teacher People. (P) Vo Gotta Gotta. (P) Wild Sport. Sailing. The Morning Line. To Die Two Hill. To Kate Gay Baby. (P) To Kate Plus. To Kate Two. Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader: To Kate Special. To Friends. (R) To Friends. (R) Beyonce Live – World Tour. Channel 4 Racing. Dine with Me. (P) Dine with Me. (P) Dine with Me. (P) Dine with Me. (P) Dine with Me. (P) Dine with Me. (R)

The Political Show. Liberal Democrat reverse policy announcement.

Channel 4 News.

Storyville. Exploring whether science should have the same rights as humans.

Mock and Mole Fashion Catwalk. Under Mickey and Phil Spencer celebrate the fashion season in style. (R)

Mock and Mole Fashion Catwalk. Advice on choosing Christmas parties for all ages. (R)

FILM: The White Sparrow. (2008) Premiere. Comedy, about a 300, starring Sean Maguire and Carmen Electra.

FILM: The Break. (2008) Drama, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Tilda Swinton.

King of the Hill. Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip. (R) Brothers & Sisters. (R) One Tree Hill. ER. (R) Cold Countdown. (R)

Channel Five

Milkshake! Your Sport. The Gadget Show (R) Film: All I Want for Christmas. (2007) Drama, starring Girl O'Grady. Film: The Angel of Pennsylvania Avenue. (2008) Depression-era drama, starring Dylan Scarwid. Film: Adventure Express. (1999) Cold War thriller, starring Lee Marvin. Five News. Film: Airport. (1970) Disaster movie, starring Burt Lancaster.

NCIS. A Marine suspected of murdering a girl is killed while jogging, and a search of his personal laptop reveals her body – but Gibbs finds that there is more to the case than meets the eye. (R)

NCIS. Tony opens a letter containing an injectable white powder that infects him with a deadly virus, prompting McGee and Gibbs to launch for the powder and find its source. (R)

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. Film one of five. Langston is suspended for being involved in the murder of a journalist. Also he is planning to make a story revealing line of working with Hodges's killer. (R)

CSI: NY. Stella's DNA is linked to an unsolved homicide case. (R)

CSI: NY. John McGinnis (premiere). (R)

Cops & Crime.

Sky+Casino. Fifth Gear. (R) Your Sport. Hardy's Helpline. (R) The Mill. Chalet Show. (R) Thomas & Friends. (R) Tony the Rolling Cat (R)

Digital

ITV2

Coronation Street. Coronation Street: The Historic Final Episode. Coronation Street: The Big 50. Harry Hill's Best TV Bits. Native Dive Rescue. Coronation Street: 50 Years, 50 Moments. The Jeff Foster Show. Celebrity Juice. Coronation Street special. Coronation Street (repeat).

ITV4

Football. Film: Flash Gordon (2004) The Professionals. The Sunset Boulevard. Flat Out (R) Wish Wish Wish. Gordon

ITV3

Film: Flash Gordon (2004) The Professionals. The Sunset Boulevard. Flat Out (R) Wish Wish Wish. Gordon

BBC THREE

The Fred Haddon Holiday. Qi XL. ITV Midlands. Film: Brian Wright (2004) Rocket Heights. Good News. Eastenders. Wright's Big Week. Antiques Roadshow. Dead TV. Dead Ice. Rocket Heights. Good News. Dead.

BBC FOUR

Crime Cities Detroit – The Motor City. Night Falls Dublin. The Kill. Wild Scotland. The Kill. Wild Scotland. Antiques Roadshow. The Kill. Wild Scotland. Antiques Roadshow.

E4

Hollyoaks. Little Britain. Friends. Ugly Betty. The Big Bang Theory. Friends. The Hot Chicks. Film: Ghosts (1993)

FILM 4

Air Force. (1943) Never Go Back. (1978) Wendy and Mary. (1963) Drama, starring Rosemary Murphy. Angie Alice Way (1993) Comedy, starring Angie Weiss and Maggie Wright. Thunderbirds. (2007) Gritty action adventure, starring Brian Le Bouef. Film: Sweet Home. (2007) Horror, starring Gordon Brady.

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Sunday TV

Choice

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. 7.35 Match of the Day. (R) 9.00 The Andrew Marr Show. 10.00 Fern Britton Meets Jesse Jackson. 11.00 Country Tracks. 12.00 The Politics Show. 1.00 Wild Weather: The South West. 1.30 EastEnders. 3.15 Drop Zone. 5.15 Points of View. 5.30 Songs of Praise. 6.05 BBC News; Regional News; Weather. 6.30 Jimmy's Food Factory (R)

6.00 Countryfile. Julia Bradbury watches avocets in the wetlands of Devon, while Adam Henson learns how to produce mussels in an ecologically friendly way.

7.00 Strictly Come Dancing. This year's finalists are revealed.

7.30 Antiques Roadshow. From the former drawing offices of Harland and Wolff shipyard, Belfast. (R)

8.30 Inspector George Gently. Bacchus and Gently hunt for the murderer of a waitress working at Newcastle's first hostess club – an establishment that has greatly upset the local religious community. (R)

10.00 BBC News; Regional News; Weather.

10.25 The Impressions Show with Culshaw and Stephenson. More spoofs and send-ups by Jon Culshaw and Debra Stephenson.

10.55 Match of the Day 2. Including highlights of Tottenham Hotspur v Chelsea.

12.05 The Apprentice. (R) Weatherview. 1.05 Sign Zone: Coast. (R) 2.05 Holby City. (R) 3.05 Who Do You Think You Are? (R) 4.05 BBC News.

BBC2

6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 10.00 Something for the Weekend. 11.30 Escape to the Country. (R) 12.00 Film: Triple Cross. (1966) Second World War spy adventure, with Christopher Plummer. 2.00 Live Snooker: UK Championship. Coverage of the opening session of the final. 5.30 Film: The Three Musketeers (1993) Swashbuckling comedy adventure, with Kiefer Sutherland.

7.00 Johnny Kingdom's Year with the Birds. As spring arrives, the wildlife expert films blue tits, blackbirds and swallows and realises the great spotted woodpeckers have abandoned their roosting site.

7.30 Dad's Army. Walker is caught smuggling Italian PoWs out of camp at night, but far from being a traitor, he is furthering the war effort – and making some money on the side. (R)

8.00 Live Snooker: UK Championship. Hazel Irvine introduces coverage of the concluding session of the final of the ranking tournament.

12.00 Never Mind the Buzzcocks. Comedian Lee Mack hosts the music quiz. (R) 12.30 The Stephen K Amos Show. Paul Hammer meets Matt Lucas and David Walliams. Last in the series. (R) 1.00 Film: Homicide. (1991) A detective discovers the murder of an elderly Jewish woman was part of an anti-Semitic conspiracy. David Mamet's crime thriller, with Joe Mantegna, William H Macy and Ving Rhames. 2.35 BBC News. 4.30 Close.

ITV1

6.00 CITV: The Fluffy Club. 7.25 Toonattik. 8.25 Monk. 9.25 The X Factor. (R) 11.30 This Morning Sunday. 12.30 News; Weather. 12.40 Regional Programme. 12.45 Coronation Street. 5.15 Midsomer Murders. (R)

6.15 Regional Programme.

6.30 ITV News; Weather.

6.45 All Star Family Fortunes. EastEnders star John Partridge (Christian Clarke) and Caroline Flack, co-host of I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here Now!, compete to win cash for charity.

7.00 The X Factor. The two remaining finalists have one more chance to impress the public as they each perform the winner's single, before Dermot O'Leary reveals the champion. Last in the series.

9.30 Piers Meets Elton: A Life Stories Special. Elton John talks to Piers Morgan about his long career in music – including years of excess when he took drugs and abused alcohol – and performs two songs for the studio audience.

10.30 ITV News; Weather.

10.45 FILM: Music and Lyrics. (2007) A washed-up pop idol teams up with a dippy plant carer to write a song for a teenage music star and ends up falling in love. Comedy, with Hugh Grant and Drew Barrymore.

12.00 The Zone. ITV News Headlines. 2.00 Motorsport UK. 2.30 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4

6.10 Sali Mali. (R) 6.15 Planet Cook. (R) 6.45 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.00 Survival of the Fittest. 7.30 Freesports on 4. 7.55 World B-Boy Series. 8.20 T4: Hollyoaks. 11.35 T4: Friends. (R) 12.05 T4: Friends. (R) 12.30 T4: Ugly Betty. 1.30 T4: The Simpsons. (R) 2.15 T4: The Simpsons. (R) 2.30 Film: Volcano. (1997) Thriller, starring Tommy Lee Jones. 4.30 Deal or No Deal. 5.30 Film: Elf (2003) Fantasy comedy with Will Ferrell.

7.30 Channel 4 News.

7.55 4thought.tv. A member of the public offers their opinion on animal rights.

8.00 Celebrity Come Dine with Me Christmas Special. Food and dining challenge, with former EastEnders actress Hannah Waterman, music impresario David Gest, TV gardener Diarmuid Gavin and Loose Women panellist Sherrie Hewson. (R)

9.00 Any Human Heart. Logan returns to his old flat in London, where he becomes involved with an anti-fascist organisation – only to discover his new friends have sinister plans. Last in the series.

10.25 Desperate Housewives. Paul's plan for Wisteria Lane is revealed.

11.25 4Ontheif @ Cris. With Jack Osbourne, Uri Geller, Tim Minchin and Holly Walsh. (R)

12.15 The Real Housewives of New Jersey. 1.15 American Football Live: Dallas Cowboys v Philadelphia Eagles (Kick-off 1.20am). 4.45 Freesports on 4. (R) 5.15 Grudge Match. (R) 5.25 Countdown. (R)

Channel Five

6.00 Milkshake!: Peppa Pig. 6.05 Roary the Racing Car. (R) 6.15 Fifi and the Flowertots. (R) 6.25 Fireman Sam. (R) 6.30 Rupert Bear. (R) 6.40 Miss Spider's Sunny Patch Friends. (R) 7.00 Mio Mao. (R) 7.05 The WotWots. (R) 7.20 Rhubarb and Custard Too. (R) 7.30 Harry and His Bucket Full of Dinosaurs. (R) 7.45 Make Way for Noddy. (R) 7.55 Mist: Sheepdog Tales. (R) 8.05 Little Princess. (R) 8.20 The Adventures of Bottle Top Bill and His Best Friend Corky. (R) 8.30 Franklin. (R) 8.45 Castle Farm. (R) 9.00 Olivia. (R) 9.15 The Mr Men Show. (R) 9.30 George Shrinks. (R) 10.00 Shake!: iCarly. 10.25 True Jackson, VP. 11.00 Your Sport. (R) 11.15 Street Market Chefs. (R) 11.45 Film: Cats & Dogs. (2001) Comedy, starring Jeff Goldblum. 1.30 Film: Blizzard. (2003) Family drama, starring Brenda Blethyn. 3.30 Film: Snow White. (2001) Fairytale fantasy, starring Kristin Kreuk. 5.15 Five News. 5.20 Film: Force 10 from Navarone. (1978) Second World War adventure sequel, starring Harrison Ford.

7.50 FILM: The One. (2001) Futuristic martial arts adventure, starring Carla Gugino and Jason Statham.

9.40 FILM: Dirty Dancing. (1987) Romantic drama, with Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey.

11.45 FILM: Fools Rush In. (1997) Romantic comedy, starring Matthew Perry and Salma Hayek.

1.50 SuperCasino. 4.00 HouseBusters. (R) 4.25 Fifth Gear. (R) 4.50 Your Sport. (R) 5.00 Hana's Helpline. (R) 5.10 The Milkshake! Show. (R) 5.15 Thomas & Friends. (R) 5.25 Roary the Racing Car. (R)

Digital

ITV2

5.45 Take Me Out 6.45 Coronation Street The Big 50 8.15 The Vampire Diaries 9.10 Taylor Swift: The Hot Desk 9.30 The Xtra Factor 10.35 The Only Way is Essex: Totally Vajazzled 11.35 Kerry Katona – The Next Chapter

ITV3

3.25 Inspector Wexford 5.50 Agatha Christie's Marple 7.50 Agatha Christie's Poirot 9.00 Single-Handed 11.00 Film: The House of the Spirits (1994)

ITV4

1.30 Film: The Last Sunset (1961) 3.35 Film: The Man From the Alamo (1953) 5.35 Film: Blues Brothers 2000 (1998) 8.10 Film: Jaws: The Revenge (1987) Thriller sequel, starring Michael Caine. 10.00 Film: Mad Max (1979) Action adventure, starring Mel Gibson. 11.55 Film: Cass (2008)

BBC THREE

7.00 Great Movie Mistakes 8.00 Sherlock 9.30 Gavin & Stacey: The Outtakes 10.00 How Not to Live Your Life 10.30 Family Guy 11.10 American Dad

BBC FOUR

7.00 Time to Remember 7.30 Macbeth 10.00 Film: La Fille a Fidel (2006) 11.35 Cane Clog Dancing – Treasures of English Folk Dance

E4

2.45 Film: The Italian Job (2003) Crime thriller remake, starring Mark Wahlberg. 5.00 Friends 6.00 Glee 7.00 Life Unexpected 7.55 Friends 8.00 Film: Fantastic Four (2005) Sci-fi comic-book adventure, starring Ioan Gruffudd. 11.00 Rude Tube

FILM4

3.15 The Big Trees (1952) 5.00 The Bad and the Beautiful (1952) Drama, with Kirk Douglas and Lana Turner. 7.15 Black Knight (2001) Comedy adventure, starring Martin Lawrence. 9.00 Blade: Trinity (2004) Action thriller sequel, starring Wesley Snipes. 11.10 Mask (1985) Fact-based drama, starring Cher.

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the pulse

Monday

BBC1 6.00 Breakfast. 9.15 Rip Off Britain. 10.00 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) BBC News; Weather. 11.00 Real Rescues. 11.45 To Buy or Not to Buy. BBC News; Weather. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.30 Regional News; Weather. 1.45 Doctors. 2.15 Escape to the Country. (R) 3.00 BBC News; Weather; Regional News. 3.05 CBBC. 5.15 Weakest Link. 6.00 BBC News; Weather. 6.30 Regional News Programmes; Weather. 7.00 The One Show. 7.30 Inside Out; BBC News; Regional News. 8.00 EastEnders. 8.30 Baby P: In His Mother's Words – Panorama. 9.00 Accused. 10.00 BBC News. 10.25 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 A Question of Sport. 11.05 Sports Personality of the Year: The Contenders. 11.45 The Graham Norton Show. (R) Weatherview. 12.40 Sign Zone: The Apprentice. (R) 1.40 A Life without Work. (R) 2.40 The Story of Science – Power, Proof and Passion. (R) 3.40 BBC News.

BBC2 6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 8.30 CBeebies. 11.30 Animal Park. (R) 12.00 Daily Politics. 12.30 GMT with George Alagiah. 1.00 Due South. (R) 1.45 Film 2010 with Claudia Winkleman. (R) 2.15 Ready Steady Cook. (R) 3.00 Murder, She Wrote. (R) 3.45 Flog It! Ten of the Best. 4.30 Pointless. (R) 5.15 The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off. 6.00 Celebrity Eggheads. 6.30 Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two. 7.00 This World: Pakistan's Flood Doctor. 8.00 University Challenge. 8.30 Miranda. 9.00 Ian Hislop's Age of the Do-Gooders. 10.00 Grumpy Old Men. (R) 10.30 Newsnight; Weather. 11.20 American Dream. (R) 12.20 BBC News. 3.40 Close.

ITV1 6.00 Daybreak. 8.30 Lorraine. 9.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show. 10.30 This Morning. 12.30 Loose Women. 1.30 ITV News; Weather. 1.55 Regional News; Weather. 2.00 House Gift. 3.00 Dickinson's Real Deal. (R) 3.50 Regional Weather. 4.00 Midsomer Murders. (R) 5.00 The Alan Titchmarsh Show. 6.00 Regional News; Weather. 6.30 ITV News; Weather. 7.00 Emmerdale. 7.30 Coronation Street. 8.00 Countrywise Kitchen. 8.30 Coronation Street. 9.00 The Savoy. 10.00 ITV News at Ten; Weather. 10.30 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 Film: Young Adam. (2003) Premiere. Period drama, starring Ewan McGregor. 12.25 The Zone; ITV News Headlines. 2.25 UEFA Champions League Weekly. 2.55 The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) 4.40 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.10 Sail Mail. (R) 6.15 The Treacle People. (R) 6.30 Planet Cook. (R) 6.50 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.15 Freshly Squeezed. 7.40 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) 8.05 Smallville. 9.00 One Tree Hill. 9.55 Friends. (R) 10.25 Friends. (R) 10.55 Glee. (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Summary. 12.05 Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader: T4 Movie Special. (R) 12.30 Iron Chef UK. 1.35 Film: Hills of Home. (1948) Family drama, with Edmund Gwenn. 3.25 Countdown. 4.10 Deal or No Deal. 5.00 Come Dine with Me. 5.30 Four in a Bed. 6.00 The Simpsons. 6.30 Hollyoaks. 7.00 Channel 4 News. 7.55 4thought.tv. 8.00 Heston's Christmas Feast. (R) 9.00 River Cottage Christmas. 10.00 Alan Carr: Chatty Man. 11.05 Peep Show. (R) 11.40 The Simpsons. (R) 12.10 Music on 4: Favourites: James Blunt. 12.40 Premier League Poker. 1.40 Film: Guilty By Suspicion. (1991) Drama, starring Robert De Niro. 3.25 King of the Hill. 4.10 Brothers & Sisters. (R) 4.55 ER. (R) 5.40 One Tree Hill.

Channel Five 6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 The Wright Stuff. 10.45 Trisha Goddard. (R) 11.45 Five News. 11.50 CSI: NY. (R) 12.45 CSI: NY. (R) 1.45 Neighbours. 2.15 Home and Away. 2.50 Your Sport. 2.55 Meals in Moments. (R) 3.05 Film: A Christmas Visitor. (2002) Drama, starring Reagan Pasternak. 5.00 Five News; Weather. 5.30 Neighbours. (R) 6.00 Home and Away. (R) 6.25 Live from Studio Five. 7.00 Five News at 7. 7.30 How Do They Do It?; Five News Update. 8.00 The Gadget Show; Five News at 9. 9.00 Extreme Fishing with Robson Green. 10.00 Film: Sudden Impact. (1983) Crime thriller sequel, directed by and starring Clint Eastwood. 12.25 The World of Stupid Criminals. 12.55 SuperCasino. 4.00 The FBI Files. (R) 4.45 House Doctor. (R) 5.10 Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R)

Tuesday

BBC1 6.00 Breakfast. 9.15 Rip Off Britain. 10.00 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) BBC News; Weather. 11.00 Real Rescues. 11.45 To Buy or Not to Buy. BBC News; Weather. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.30 Regional News; Weather. 1.45 Doctors. 2.15 Escape to the Country. (R) 3.00 BBC News; Weather; Regional News. 3.05 CBBC. 5.15 Weakest Link. (R) 6.00 BBC News; Weather. 6.30 Regional News Programmes; Weather. 7.00 The One Show. 7.30 EastEnders; BBC News; Regional News. 8.00 Holby City. 9.00 Crimewatch. 10.00 BBC News. 10.25 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 Crimewatch Update. 10.45 Imagine. 11.35 Film: The Wackness. (2008) Premiere. Comedy drama, starring Ben Kingsley. Weatherview. 1.15 Sign Zone: See Hear. (R) 1.45 The Big Silence. (R) 2.45 The Blonde Vet. (R) 3.15 BBC News.

BBC2 6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 8.30 CBeebies. 11.30 Animal Park. (R) 12.00 Daily Politics. 12.30 GMT with George Alagiah. 1.00 Due South. (R) 1.45 Car Booty. (R) 2.15 Ready Steady Cook. (R) 3.00 Murder, She Wrote. (R) 3.45 Flog It! Ten of the Best. 4.30 Pointless. (R) 5.15 The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off. 6.00 Celebrity Eggheads. 6.30 Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two. 7.00 Coast. (R) 8.00 Decade of Discovery. 9.00 Pompeii: Life and Death in a Roman Town. 10.00 Miranda. (R) 10.30 Newsnight; Weather. 11.20 This World: Pakistan's Flood Doctor. (R) 12.20 BBC News. 3.15 Close.

ITV1 6.00 Daybreak. 8.30 Lorraine. 9.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show. 10.30 This Morning. 12.30 Loose Women. 1.30 ITV News; Weather. 1.55 Regional News; Weather. 2.00 House Gift. 3.00 Dickinson's Real Deal. (R) 3.50 Regional Weather. 4.00 Midsomer Murders. (R) 5.00 The Alan Titchmarsh Show. 6.00 Regional News; Weather. 6.30 ITV News; Weather. 7.00 Emmerdale. 7.30 Living in Fear: Tonight. 8.00 A Touch of Frost. (R) 10.00 ITV News at Ten; Weather. 10.30 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 The War You Don't See. 12.25 The Zone; ITV News Headlines. 2.25 The Rockford Files. (R) 3.20 The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) 4.15 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.25 Planet Cook. (R) 6.45 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.15 Freshly Squeezed. 7.40 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) 8.05 Smallville. 9.00 One Tree Hill. 9.55 Friends. (R) 10.30 Friends. (R) 11.00 Glee. (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Summary. 12.05 Iron Chef UK. 1.05 Film: Swiss Family Robinson. (1960) Disney adventure, starring John Mills. 3.25 Countdown. 4.10 Deal or No Deal. 5.00 Come Dine with Me. 5.30 Four in a Bed. 6.00 The Simpsons. 6.30 Hollyoaks. 7.00 Channel 4 News. 7.55 4thought.tv. 8.00 Kirstie's Homemade Home. 9.00 The Family. 10.00 Frankie Boyle's Tramadol Nights. 10.35 The Morgana Show. 11.10 The Big Bang Theory. 11.35 Robert's Web. (R) 12.10 Music on 4: Russian Standard Vodka Presents: Paloma Faith. 12.25 Music on 4: The Album Chart Show Spotlight. 12.40 Music on 4: The Crush. 1.05 World B-Boy Series. (R) 2.00 Freesports on 4. (R) 2.30 Beach Volleyball. 3.20 KOTV Boxing Weekly. 3.50 World Sport. (R) 4.15 Survival of the Fittest. (R) 4.45 Sailing. (R) 5.10 Deadliest Catch. (R)

Channel Five 6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 The Wright Stuff. 10.45 Trisha Goddard. (R) 11.45 Five News. 11.50 CSI: NY. (R) 12.45 CSI: NY. (R) 1.45 Neighbours. 2.15 Home and Away. 2.50 Your Sport. 2.55 Meals in Moments. (R) 3.10 Film: The Christmas Gift. (1986) Drama, starring John Denver. 5.00 Five News; Weather. 5.30 Neighbours. (R) 6.00 Home and Away. (R) 6.25 Live from Studio Five. 7.00 Five News at 7. 7.30 Street Market Chefs: Two Monmouthshire chefs produce meals using Welsh lamb; Five News Update. 8.00 Sea Patrol UK. A rock climber is stranded on a cliff face. Last in the series; Five News at 9. 9.00 CSI: Miami. A car bomb kills an attorney who was working with Delko. 10.00 CSI: NY. Mac and Stella track a serial killer to a Manhattan museum. (R) Five News Update. 11.00 CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. Catherine's father is suspected of murder. (R) 12.00 True CSI. (R) 12.55 SuperCasino. 4.00 The FBI Files. (R) 4.45 House Doctor. (R) 5.10 Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R)

Wednesday

BBC1 6.00 Breakfast. 9.15 Rip Off Britain. 10.00 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) BBC News; Weather. 11.00 Real Rescues. 11.45 To Buy or Not to Buy. BBC News; Weather. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.30 Regional News; Weather. 1.45 Doctors. 2.15 Escape to the Country. (R) 3.00 BBC News; Weather; Regional News. 3.05 CBBC. 5.15 Weakest Link. 6.00 BBC News; Weather. 6.30 Regional News Programmes; Weather. 7.00 The One Show. 7.30 Dig 1940; BBC News; Regional News. 8.00 Jimmy's Food Factory. 8.30 Nigel Slater's Simple Suppers. 9.00 The Apprentice. 10.00 BBC News. 10.25 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 The National Lottery Wednesday Night Draws. 10.45 Film 2010 with Claudia Winkleman; National Lottery Update. 11.25 Film: When a Man Loves a Woman. (1994) Drama, starring Andy Garcia and Meg Ryan. Weatherview. 1.30 Sign Zone: Country Tracks. (R) 2.25 Return of the Rhino: A Last Chance to See Special. (R) 3.25 A Life without Work. (R) 4.25 BBC News.

BBC2 6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 8.30 CBeebies. 11.30 Daily Politics. 1.00 See Hear. 1.30 Car Booty. (R) 2.15 Ready Steady Cook. (R) 3.00 Murder, She Wrote. (R) 3.45 Flog It! Ten of the Best. 4.30 Pointless. (R) 5.15 The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off. 6.00 Celebrity Eggheads. 6.30 Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two. 7.00 Escape to the Country. (R) 8.00 Edwardian Farm. 9.00 Ancient Worlds. 10.00 The Apprentice: You're Fired! 10.30 Newsnight; Weather. 11.20 At Home with the Georgians. (R) 12.20 BBC News. 4.25 Close.

ITV1 6.00 Daybreak. 8.30 Lorraine. 9.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show. 10.30 This Morning. 12.30 Loose Women. 1.30 ITV News; Weather. 1.55 Regional News; Weather. 2.00 House Gift. 3.00 Dickinson's Real Deal. (R) 3.50 Regional Weather. 4.00 Midsomer Murders. (R) 5.00 The Alan Titchmarsh Show. 6.00 Regional News; Weather. 6.30 ITV News; Weather. 7.00 Emmerdale. 7.30 The Lakes. (R) 8.00 A Touch of Frost. (R) 10.00 ITV News at Ten; Weather. 10.30 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 Film: Falling Down. (1993) Urban thriller, starring Michael Douglas. 12.40 The Zone; ITV News Headlines. 2.40 Film: End of Days. (1999) Supernatural action thriller, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. 4.40 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.00 Sail Mail. (R) 6.05 The Treacle People. (R) 6.15 Planet Cook. (R) 6.40 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.05 Freshly Squeezed. 7.35 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) 8.00 According to Jim. (R) 8.30 Frasier. (R) 9.00 One Tree Hill. 9.55 Friends. (R) 10.30 Friends. (R) 11.00 Glee. (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Summary. 12.05 River Cottage Bites. (R) 12.20 Iron Chef UK. 1.20 Film: The Love Bug. (1968) Disney comedy, starring Dean Jones. 3.25 Countdown. 4.10 Deal or No Deal. 5.00 Come Dine with Me. 5.30 Four in a Bed. 6.00 The Simpsons. 6.30 Hollyoaks. 7.00 Channel 4 News. 7.55 4thought.tv. 8.00 The Million Pound Drop Live. 9.00 Grand Designs. 10.00 Hollyoaks. 11.05 The Event. (R) 12.05 Reaper. 12.50 Film: Isolation. (2005) Premiere. Horror, starring Essie Davis. 2.30 King of the Hill. 2.55 ER. (R) 3.40 Brothers & Sisters. (R) 4.30 Hill Street Blues. (R) 5.25 One Tree Hill.

Channel Five 6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 The Wright Stuff. 10.45 Trisha Goddard. (R) 11.45 Five News. 11.50 CSI: NY. (R) 12.45 CSI: NY. (R) 1.45 Neighbours. 2.15 Home and Away. 2.45 Meals in Moments. (R) 2.55 Meals in Moments. (R) 3.10 Film: Noel. (2004) Drama, starring Susan Sarandon. 5.00 Five News; Weather. 5.30 Neighbours. (R) 6.00 Home and Away. (R) 6.25 Live from Studio Five. 7.00 Five News at 7. 7.30 Live UEFA Europa League Football: Liverpool v FC Utrecht (Kick-off 8.05pm). Jim Rosenthal introduces coverage of the UEFA Europa League Group K match at Anfield. 10.10 Film: Second in Command. (2006) An exiled European official guarding a US ambassador in Moldova looks for an escape route when a violent rebellion breaks out. Thriller, with Jean-Claude Van Damme. 12.00 Poker. 1.00 SuperCasino. 4.00 The FBI Files. (R) 4.45 House Doctor. (R) 5.10 Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R)

Thursday

BBC1 6.00 Breakfast. 9.15 Rip Off Britain. 10.00 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) BBC News; Weather. 11.00 Real Rescues. 11.45 To Buy or Not to Buy. BBC News; Weather. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.30 Regional News; Weather. 1.45 Doctors. 2.15 Escape to the Country. (R) 3.00 BBC News; Weather; Regional News. 3.05 CBBC. 5.15 Weakest Link. (R) 6.00 BBC News; Weather. 6.30 Regional News Programmes; Weather. 7.00 The One Show. 7.30 EastEnders; BBC News; Regional News. 8.00 The Royal Variety Performance 2010. 10.00 BBC News. 10.25 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 The Apprentice – Why I Fired Them. 11.35 This Week; Skiing; Weatherview. 12.30 Sign Zone: Baby P: In His Mother's Words – Panorama. (R) 1.00 Countryfile. (R) 1.55 Antiques Roadshow. (R) 2.55 The Young Ones. (R) 3.55 BBC News.

BBC2 6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 8.30 CBeebies. 11.30 Animal Park. (R) 12.00 Daily Politics. 12.30 GMT with George Alagiah. 1.00 Due South. (R) 1.45 Car Booty. (R) 2.15 Ready Steady Cook. (R) 3.00 Murder, She Wrote. (R) 3.45 Flog It! Ten of the Best. 4.30 Pointless. (R) 5.15 The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off. 6.00 Celebrity Eggheads. 6.30 Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two. 7.00 Best of the Culture Show 2010. 8.00 Nigella Kitchen. 8.30 Rick Stein's Christmas Odyssey. 9.00 At Home with the Georgians. 10.00 Never Mind the Buzzcocks. 10.30 Newsnight; Weather. 11.20 Best of the Culture Show 2010. (R) 12.20 The Apprentice: You're Fired! 1.00 BBC News. 3.55 Close.

ITV1 6.00 Daybreak. 8.30 Lorraine. 9.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show. 10.30 This Morning. 12.30 Loose Women. 1.30 ITV News; Weather. 1.55 Regional News; Weather. 2.00 House Gift. 3.00 Dickinson's Real Deal. (R) 3.50 Regional Weather. 4.00 Midsomer Murders. (R) 5.00 The Alan Titchmarsh Show. 6.00 Regional News; Weather. 6.30 ITV News; Weather. 7.00 Emmerdale. 7.30 Christmas or Bust?: Tonight. 8.00 Emmerdale. 8.30 Coronation Street. 9.00 Celebrity Grimefighters. 10.00 ITV News at Ten; Weather. 10.30 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 Film: 2 Fast 2 Furious. (2003) Thriller sequel, with Paul Walker, Tyrese Gibson and Eva Mendes. 12.30 The Zone. 2.35 Surface. (R) 3.20 The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) 4.10 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.10 Sail Mail. (R) 6.15 The Treacle People. (R) 6.25 Planet Cook. (R) 6.45 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.10 Freshly Squeezed. 7.40 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) 8.05 According to Jim. (R) 8.35 Frasier. (R) 9.05 One Tree Hill. 10.00 Friends. (R) 10.30 Friends. (R) 11.00 Glee. (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Summary. 12.05 My Eden. (R) 12.10 River Cottage Bites. (R) 12.25 Iron Chef UK. 1.25 Film: Candleshoe. (1977) Disney comedy, starring Jodie Foster. 3.25 Countdown. 4.10 Deal or No Deal. 5.00 Come Dine with Me. 5.30 Four in a Bed. 6.00 The Simpsons. 6.30 Hollyoaks. 7.00 Channel 4 News. 7.55 4thought.tv. 8.00 The Million Pound Drop Live. 9.00 The House That Made Me. 10.00 Jamie's Christmas Lock-in. 11.05 Alan Carr: Chatty Man. (R) 12.10 Reaper. 1.00 Slow Joe. 1.10 Our Drugs War. (R) 2.05 Unreported World. (R) 2.35 Film: Antwone Fisher. (2002) Fact-based drama, directed by and starring Denzel Washington. 4.30 Film: The Spy in Black. (1939) Drama, starring Conrad Veidt and Valerie Hobson. 5.55 Brothers & Sisters. (R)

Channel Five 6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 The Wright Stuff. 10.45 Trisha Goddard. (R) 11.45 Five News. 11.50 CSI: NY. (R) 12.45 CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. (R) 1.45 Neighbours. 2.15 Home and Away. 2.45 Your Sport. 2.50 Meals in Moments. (R) 3.05 Film: Crazy for Christmas. (2005) 5.00 Five News; Weather. 5.30 Neighbours. (R) 6.00 Home and Away. (R) 6.25 Live from Studio Five. 7.00 Five News at 7. 7.30 Highland Emergency; Five News Update. 8.00 Demolition: The Super Stadium; Five News at 9. 9.00 NCIS. (R) 10.00 Law & Order: Criminal Intent. 10.55 Law & Order. (R) 11.55 Cops in Crisis. (R) 12.15 SuperCasino. 4.05 Divine Designs. (R) 4.30 Rough Guide to Bang for Your Buck. (R) 4.45 House Doctor. (R) 5.10 Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R)

Friday

BBC1 6.00 Breakfast. 9.15 Rip Off Britain. 10.00 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) BBC News; Weather. 11.00 Real Rescues. 11.45 To Buy or Not to Buy. BBC News; Weather. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.30 Regional News; Weather. 1.45 Doctors. 2.15 Escape to the Country. 3.00 BBC News; Weather; Regional News. 3.05 CBBC. 5.15 Weakest Link. 6.00 BBC News; Weather. 6.30 Regional News Programmes; Weather. 7.00 The One Show. 7.30 A Question of Sport. (R) BBC News; Regional News. 8.00 EastEnders. 8.30 QI. 9.00 Have I Got News for You. 9.30 Live at the Apollo. 10.00 BBC News. 10.25 Regional News; Weather. 10.35 The Graham Norton Show. 11.20 The National Lottery Friday Night Draws. 11.30 Film: Severance. (2006) Weatherview. 1.05 Sign Zone: The Normans. (R) 2.05 Horizon: What Happened Before the Big Bang? (R) 3.05 The Science of The Young Ones. (R) 3.50 BBC News.

BBC2 6.00 CBeebies. 7.00 CBBC. 8.30 CBeebies. 11.30 Animal Park. (R) 12.00 Daily Politics. 12.30 GMT with George Alagiah. 1.00 Due South. (R) 1.45 Car Booty. (R) 2.15 Ready Steady Cook. (R) 3.00 Murder, She Wrote. (R) 3.45 Flog It! Ten of the Best. 4.30 Pointless. (R) 5.15 The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off. 6.00 Celebrity Eggheads. 6.30 Strictly Come Dancing – It Takes Two. 7.30 Mastermind. 8.00 Natural World. 9.00 John Sergeant on Tracks of Empire. 10.00 Buzzcocks: The Doctor Who Special. (R) 10.30 Newsnight. 11.00 The Review Show; Weather. 12.05 Film: The Gigolos. (2006) 1.40 BBC News. 3.50 Close.

ITV1 6.00 Daybreak. 8.30 Lorraine. 9.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show. 10.30 This Morning. 12.30 Loose Women. 1.30 ITV News; Weather. 1.55 Regional News; Weather. 2.00 House Gift. 3.00 Dickinson's Real Deal. (R) 3.50 Regional Weather. 4.00 Midsomer Murders. (R) 5.00 The Alan Titchmarsh Show. 6.00 Regional News; Weather. 6.30 ITV News; Weather. 7.00 Emmerdale. 7.30 Coronation Street. 8.00 Countrywise Kitchen. 8.30 Coronation Street. 9.00 A Night of Heroes: The Military Awards 2010. 10.30 ITV News; Weather. 11.00 Regional News; Weather. 11.05 Film: Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome. (1985) 1.00 The Zone; ITV News Headlines. 3.05 Film: On Deadly Ground. (1994) 4.45 ITV Nightscreen. 5.30 ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.00 The Treacle People. (R) 6.50 Yo Gabba Gabba. (R) 7.15 Freshly Squeezed. 7.45 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) 8.10 According to Jim. (R) 8.35 Frasier. (R) 9.05 One Tree Hill. 10.00 Friends. (R) 10.30 Friends. (R) 11.00 Glee. (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Summary. 12.05 River Cottage Bites. (R) 12.20 Iron Chef UK. 1.20 Film: Ivanhoe. (1952) Medieval adventure, starring Robert Taylor. 3.25 Countdown. 4.10 Deal or No Deal. 5.00 Come Dine with Me. 5.30 Four in a Bed. 6.00 The Simpsons. 6.30 Hollyoaks. 7.00 Channel 4 News. 7.25 4thought.tv. 7.30 Teen Undertaker. (R) 8.00 The Million Pound Drop Live. 9.00 The Event: President Martinez Is Kidnapped. 10.00 Peep Show. 10.30 Robert's Web. 11.05 Frankie Boyle's Tramadol Nights. (R) 11.40 The Morgana Show. (R) 12.15 Hollyoaks. (R) 1.15 Music on 4: Mercury Prize Sessions: Chapel Club. 1.30 Music on 4: Live at Russian Standard Originals. 1.40 This Week's 4Music Top 20. 3.30 Brothers & Sisters. (R) 4.15 ER. (R) 5.00 One Tree Hill.

Channel Five 6.00 Milkshake! 9.15 The Wright Stuff. 10.45 Trisha Goddard. (R) 11.45 Five News. 11.50 CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. (R) 12.45 CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. (R) 1.45 Neighbours. 2.15 Home and Away. 2.50 Your Sport. 2.55 Meals in Moments. (R) 3.10 Film: I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus. (2002) Family comedy, starring Connie Sellecca. 5.00 Five News; Weather. 5.30 Neighbours. (R) 6.00 Home and Away. (R) 6.25 Live from Studio Five. 7.00 Five News at 7. 7.30 Zoo Days. (R) Five News Update. 8.00 Emergency Bikers; Five News at 9. 9.00 The Mentalist. 10.00 Law & Order: Special Victims Unit. 10.55 Law & Order: Special Victims Unit. 11.55 Cops in Crisis. (R) 12.15 SuperCasino. 4.05 Motorsport Mundial. 4.30 Street Market Chefs. (R) 4.55 Rough Guide to Islands. (R) 5.10 Michaela's Wild Challenge. (R)

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No.094

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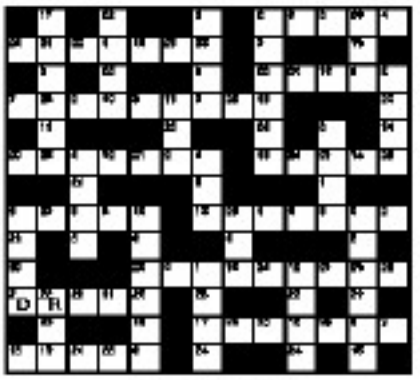
Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



1	14
2 D	15
3	16
4	17
5	18
6	19
7	20
8	21
9	22 R
10	23
11	24
12	25
13	26

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION

I	W	C	J	E	Z	U	A	Q	L	K	N	O	
G	B	P	Y	D	H	R	X	V	S	F	M	T	

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues – both fit the same grid.

Cryptic Clues:

Across

9. Cockle nothing go on producing heart rock (5,4)
8. Alarm drains plains (4)
9. Think then are stem are swing (5)
10. His introduction is bitch (6)
11. Cut them in half strip poles (5)
13. Reaching pins event (3)
15. Fall in love une legend (4)
16. Chief demolition scene – in kind (5)
18. Sound entertain (4)
20. Take you trip dim children Jungle (5)
21. Heavy be ugly you tom Mars offer (3)
24. Tim compass pining ingredient milk product (3)
25. Ad on a dim non body (6,3)
26. [illegible] garden collins (4)
27. Kona prince kent cells (5)

Down

1. Harvest – on car dice red (4,3)
2. [illegible] information [illegible] (5,5)
3. Explosive stolen rich location (4)
5. Pressure by there's a sound reason for it (5)
6. They out waving figure (3)
7. The character in for the pitch (4)
8. [illegible] in someone, mark business? (5)
11. Searching being rich [illegible] (5)
12. [illegible] in light comfort (4,3)
13. Martin [illegible] [illegible] (5)
17. Stop return to [illegible] (5)
19. How [illegible] (5)
20. He [illegible] (5)
22. [illegible] (4)
23. [illegible] (4)

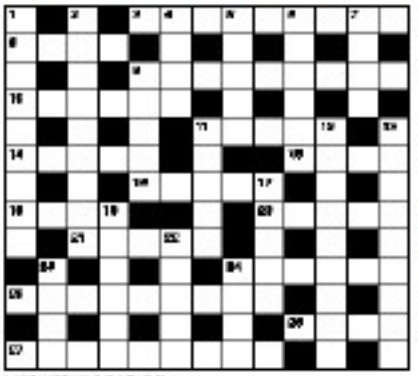
Quick Clues:

Across

9. Actor nun lying (6)
9. Speakers in crown (4)
9. Harvest (5)
10. Plan (5)
11. Petroleum (7)
14. Score (7)
14. You (4)
16. Not heavy (5)
18. Chile pepper (4)
20. Boxing [illegible] (7)
21. Mobile [illegible] (5)
24. Hunt (5)
25. Quality fish (5)
26. Organ (4)
27. Thrilling [illegible] (6)

Down

1. Impossibly (9)
2. Revolution (8)
4. Mirror (4)
5. Water (5)
6. Description (6)
7. Dynamo (4)
8. Ring (5)
11. [illegible] (5)
12. [illegible] (9)
13. [illegible] (5,2,4)
17. Stolen (6)
19. Valley (4)
22. [illegible] (7)
23. Thing (4)
24. Liar (4)



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

CRYPTIC: Across: 1 Spline, 7 Outrage, 9 Silk, 10 Ace, 11 Lured, 12 Lies, 15 Reprise, 16 Reading, 17 Tolerance, 20 Sneaker, 21 Bird, 22 Pending, 23 Ace, Down: 1 Sunburned, 2 Hebrew, 3 Bank, 4 Rock, 5 Aces, 6 Aden, 8 Gone, 13 Tent, 14 Lack, 18 Apostle, 19 Center, 20 Guise, 15 Aden, 18 Nego. QUICK: Across: 1 Oasis, 5 Ardak, 8 Hills, 9 Alabama, 11 Crossword, 13 Hint, 14 Chase, 16 Sparse, 18 Ace, 20 Aces, 21 Sense, 22 Deserted, 23 Lak. Down: 1 Ossa, 2 Sugar, 3 Nature, 4 Assembly, 6 Tiny, 7 Cube, 10 Lynch, 12 Dresser, 15 Shake, 17 Ace, 19 Aden, 20 Aces, 21 Hand

Sudoku

Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION

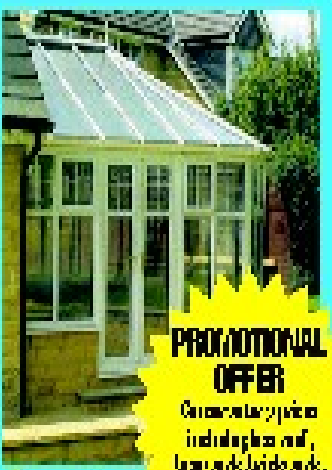
		9	4				3	
2	6	4	8					
				5				4
9	5	1				7		6
	7			6				
4		6			8	1	2	5
1				8				
	2	5			9	4	1	3
					6	8		

Circlegram

Replace the question mark with a letter so that letters within each circle can be rearranged to form words with a common theme. What are the three words, and the letter represented by the question mark?

Solution in next week's edition.

WINDOWS AND CONSERVATORIES



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Spectacular show, a 3D genie and and lashings of Twankey panky

Christopher Biggins talks to LEON BURAKOWSKI about panto, Porridge and paying the mortgage.

ONE of Britain's best loved celebrities, Christopher Biggins, is promising Wolverhampton a spectacular Grand pantomime this winter.

The actor and reality TV star is a veteran of 39 pantos but reckons Aladdin, which opens at the Grand on Saturday, could be the best yet.

"It is what I call a good old-fashioned London Palladium pantomime and what I mean by that is we have unbelievable scenery. I have been doing pantomine for 38 years and I haven't done one with scenery like this, with costumes that are so lavish and an amazing cast."

The show is a tweaked version of the production of Aladdin that broke box office records in Plymouth last year, in which veteran dame Biggins again played Widow Twankey.

"Everyone we did the panto with last year is coming back except for Aladdin and Wishee-Washee and we have put those roles together and have the amazing ventriloquist Paul Zerdin. He is brilliant.

"And we have a 3D genie... oh yes we do! " Cue familiar booming laugh.

"When I saw it in rehearsal I was absolutely blown away. It cost a lot of money and the running costs are huge for it. When Abanazar and Aladdin are in the cave with this extraordinary genie, you can see the kids trying to catch the spiders. It is phenomenal.

"It is going to be a spectacular pantomime, one of the most spectacular Wolverhampton has staged."

Biggins also has a key role in the region's other big pantomime this winter but not on stage... it was he who encouraged his close friend Joan Collins to make her panto debut this year, playing Queen Rat in Dick Whittington at Birmingham Hippodrome.

"We were talking about the fact a job had fallen through over Christmas and New Year and I said come on Joan why don't you do a pantomime. I told her she would be great. I think I sowed the seed. Sadly I don't think I will be able to see her perform but I know she's going to be fantastic. We will get together for dinner on our night off."

But another one of his celebrity pals will be calling in at the Grand for one of the performances.

Career

"Cilla (Black) will be coming to Wolverhampton because she is not doing a pantomime herself this year," said the star, whose early roles included such TV classics as the drama I, Claudius, and prison sitcom Porridge with Ronnie Barker.

"I am very lucky, I have a very varied, interesting and good career. I loved Nero in I, Claudius, and Ozzy Whitworth in Poldark from my straight acting years. I loved Surprise Surprise with Cilla, I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here and Come Dine With Me.

"As long as I can plod along and pay the mortgage – well, thankfully, I paid that off last year – I am happy to be able to live a full life."

He loves art - he once bought a Hockney for £150 that's now worth £10,000 – and technology, his most treasured possession is his iPhone, he says, and he enjoys holidays in Mauritius.

But he always makes sure he is available for the panto season. "I love the audience participation and I love to make an audience laugh and that it is for everyone, from three to 93.

"When I did the 'Jungle' I didn't do a pantomime that year, so I went and saw 15 pantomimes. I went all over the country. It was wonderful."

Aladdin is staged at the Grand from December 11 to January 30.

From left, Glenn Hughes with Jason Bonham on drums and Joe Bonamassa.

Glenn communing with the Black Country

GOOD news for fans of Anglo-American rock supergroup Black Country Communion - who perform their debut UK gig at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on December 29 – frontman Glenn Hughes is already working on songs for their second album.

The former Deep Purple and Trapeze singer, who hails from Cannock, revealed that BCC is no 'one-off' project when talking to The Chronicle from his hillside home in sunny California, which he shares with wife Gabrielle. "I love England but not the cold and the rain," he admitted.

The band features Hughes on vocals and bass guitar, drummer Jason Bonham, the Dudley-born son of the late Led Zeppelin sticksman John Bonham, with Americans – guitarist Joe Bonamassa and keyboardist Derek Sherinian. Their self-titled debut album – a slab of classic bluesy hard rock – has been a big success.

"I have prepared a lot of songs, we've probably got three-quarters of the next album," said Glenn. "Joe (Bonamassa) and Kevin (Shirley, the producer) both live in LA and we get together at Kevin's studio in Malibu. It's very cohesive and organic. I bring my songs, Joe brings his and we finish each other's songs. I have a studio at home and sometimes I have to remind myself to get out of there," said Glenn, a former rock wildman who has cleaned up his act.

Thankful

"Songwriting is what I do and I do it every day, even on Christmas Day. I am known as a rock singer, and I appreciate and am thankful for that but primarily I am a songwriter. Those creative urges get stronger the further I get from the days when I would get high or drunk."

He reckons it's fate that has brought the four of them together in a band after years of friendship, a lifetime's worth when it comes to Jason Bonham.

"I knew Jason before he knew me," said Glenn. "I remember when he was a two-year-old, John (his father) was a friend of mine and I was like an uncle to Jason. He's my friend's son and I love him to bits.

"I believe in fate and in karma. I had a dream which told me I was going to be in a rock 'n' roll band again. I was all set to make another funky Glenn record but I put the brakes on... and three weeks later I'm in this band Black Country Communion."

The name references Glenn and Jason's roots in the West Midlands.

"It was very important to me and to Jason that the first gig be at Wolverhampton Civic Hall. That really means something to us. It's a great rock venue in the heart of the Black Country. We've got to play where the name came from.

"I've played the venue about ten times but not in recent years. I played there with my first band The News in 1968, then in '69 with Finders Keepers, then several times with Trapeze and then with Deep Purple a couple of times." Just before heading down the canyon to record at Malibu, Glenn signed off with a cheery "Up the Wolves!" **LB**

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Period semi has a loft room and no upward chain

A PERIOD two-bedroomed semi-detached house with no upward chain has come onto the market in Darlaston.

Number 55 King Edward Street, off Pinfold Street, has gas central heating, double glazing, an L-shaped breakfast kitchen, lounge, dining room, downstairs bathroom/WC, loft room, rear garden and garage.

It is on the market through Paul Dubberley estate agent for offers in the region of £89,995.

A timber front door opens into the lounge, which measures 13ft 10in x 12ft and has a coved ceiling, picture rail and open flue with a feature Adams-style fireplace.

From here, a door leads to the dining room, with a timber single-glazed circular window, flame-effect gas fire set in a timber Adams style fireplace with iron surround, storage and stairs to the first floor.

In the fitted kitchen, there's a range of timber coloured wall, base and drawer units with roll-edged worksurfaces, ceramic tiled floor, electric oven, gas hob, plumbing for a washing machine, single drainer sink top and space for a fridge.

Leading off the kitchen is the half-tiled family bathroom, which includes a panelled bath with mixer taps and shower over, WC, pedestal wash basin and ceramic tiled floor. Upstairs, there are two bedrooms – both with a radiator, dado rail and power points – while the loft has been converted into a room and has laminate flooring and power points.

Gate

Outside, the property is approached via a wrought iron gate and paved pathway while the enclosed low maintenance rear garden is paved throughout with planted borders.

To the rear, there's a garage with a roller shutter door.

For more information visit the website at www.pauldubberley.co.uk or to arrange a viewing, contact 0121 505 3533.

55 King Edward Street in Darlaston is on the market for offers of £89,995

The kitchen is fitted with a range of wall and base cupboards

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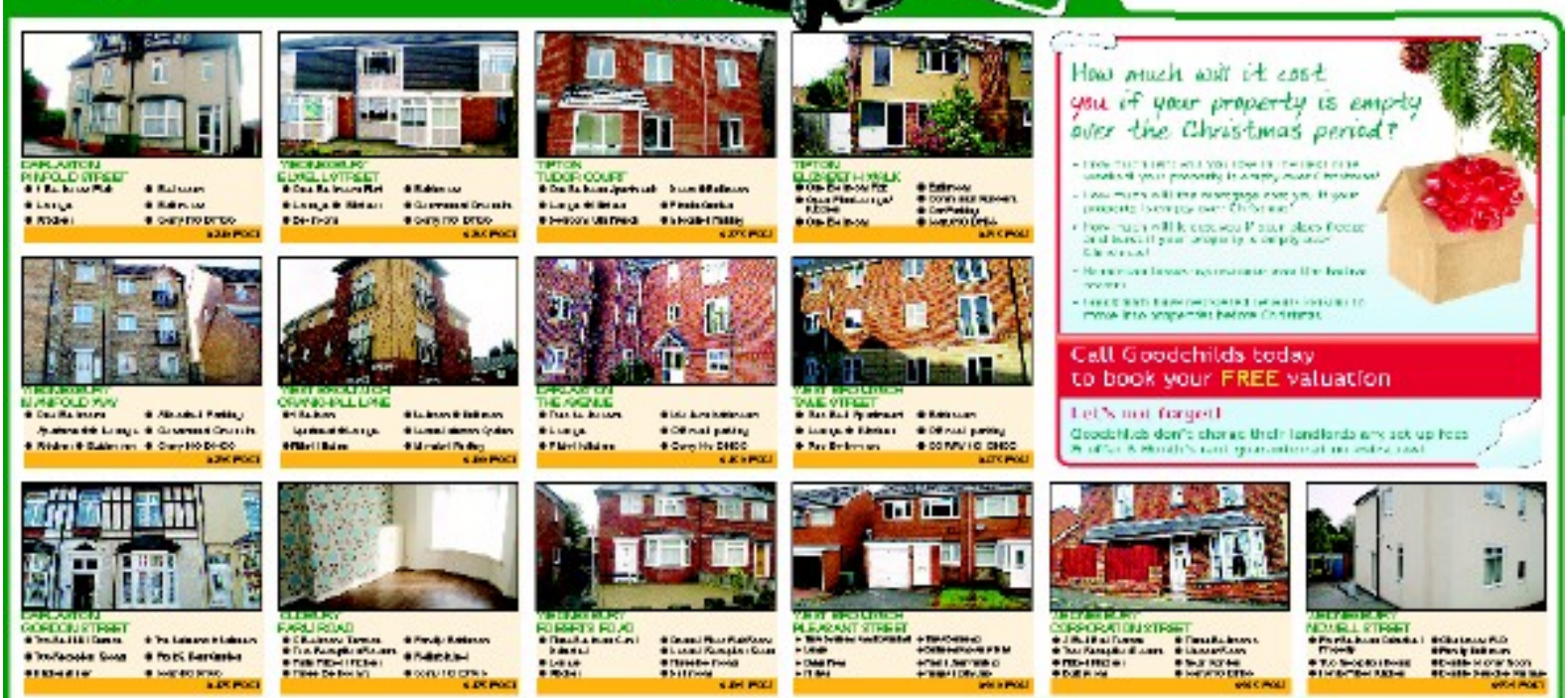

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The new Ford C-Max, above, and Grand C-Max have been awarded top marks for safety features

New Ford family car earns five-star rating

THE all-new Ford C-Max and Grand C-Max models have been awarded the maximum five-star safety ratings by the independent Euro NCAP organisation.

The pair of 'multi-activity vehicles', which went on sale in the UK this month, achieved the highest score recorded for whiplash protection and excelled in both adult occupant and child occupant safety categories.

Ford C-Max and Grand C-Max are built on Ford's global C-car platform and are the first Ford passenger cars to undergo Euro NCAP's new crash test procedures introduced last year.

Gunnar Herrmann, Ford's global medium car vehicle line director, said: "Crash test ratings are an important factor when designing and engineering our vehicles and we're delighted that Euro NCAP has recognised that both the new C-Max and Grand C-Max models offer excellent protection in the event of a collision.

"These are the first vehicles to be built on our new global C-car platform and for them to score so highly bodes well for future products including the all-new Focus which goes on sale next year."

Both new C-Max and Grand C-Max feature Ford's Intelligent Protection System (IPS) which marries a high-strength body structure with state-of-the-art restraint systems.

Generation

In total, 53 per cent of the body shell in each vehicle is made from high-strength steels, compared to 45 per cent in the previous generation vehicle. Ultra-tough Boron steel is used in the A-pillars, B-pillars, rocker panels and door reinforcement beams help to create a passenger cell that manages deformation in a crash – including frontal impacts, side impacts and side pole impacts. High strength dual-phase steel is used in the front crash structure, inner rocker panels and floor cross members for maximum crash energy absorption, and to manage deformation of the passenger cell.

C-Max and Grand C-Max also feature a front chassis subframe designed to de-couple from the lower body in a frontal collision, reducing deformation in the passenger cell footwell area.

A key feature of Ford's Intelligent Protection System restraint system for the C-Max and Grand C-Max is individual single stage front airbags and side thorax airbags for the driver and front passenger, plus standard side curtain airbags for the first and second row seats.

Driver safety is improved thanks to Ford's new steering column that reduces loads on the occupant's head and chest by moving away from the driver in high speed frontal impacts.

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Motoring group says lives would be saved by post-test training for young drivers

YOUNG driver deaths in the UK could be cut by up to a third if compulsory post-test training was introduced, according to the Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM).

Writing in the latest edition of the IAM's magazine, Advanced Driving, IAM Chairman Alistair Cheyne says that compulsory post-test training would save lives among "this most vulnerable group of drivers".

The call follows findings that a similar approach in Austria has produced a 30 per cent reduction in young driver fatalities.

IAM Chief Executive Simon Best said: "We need no reminding that 17–25 year olds — particularly young men — proportionally have more crashes and suffer more death and injury on our roads than any other group.

Improve

"Despite this, very little is being done to ensure that young people improve their driving after passing the test.

The high numbers of young drivers who continue to be killed or seriously injured graphically highlights the need for legislation that insists on post-test training that embraces all kinds of roads; especially rural roads on which young people are suffering so disproportionately."

The IAM is writing to Under Secretary of State for Transport, Mike Penning MP, raising the urgent need for post-test training.

The IAM suggest this 'module' would not be an unpopular option, and there would be no question of taking a new driver off the road if they 'failed'.

However, undertaking a second phase of short coaching sessions and driving practice off the public highway would be compulsory within a year of the test pass.

Review

In Austria, legal requirements for all novice drivers to undertake further assessment and training have been used with outstanding results.

They say that only the Department for Transport can realistically take the lead on this issue with a thorough review of driver training.

In the meantime, the IAM is taking action of its own with the launch of Momentum in the New Year. Momentum offers young drivers a low-cost assessment by an IAM examiner early in their development, which will help improve confidence, raise awareness, and reduce risk on the road.

MOTORING NEWS AND REVIEWS
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Smooth – and with all the toys

AUDI'S new A6 Saloon has been redesigned from the ground up and benefits from the brand's most advanced lightweight construction techniques.

With weight kept in check through aluminium and steel composite construction, despite enhanced equipment levels, the new A6 will deliver dynamically and in terms of efficiency – with 57mpg-plus economy potential and CO2 outputs of as little as 129g/km.

It also offers executive 'toys' such as self parking, thermal imaging cameras and massaging seats.

The new Audi A6 will be 15 per cent lighter than the old model and will feature a raft of premium features and gadgets

Aluminium

UK A6 orders will be taken from January and first deliveries will begin in the spring. Prices will start at £30,145 on the road.

Aluminium and high-tech steels make up much of the reworked body of the new A6.

Combining the two materials reduces the shell weight by around 15 per cent, and enables the A6 2.0 TDI to tip the scales at a relatively modest 1,575kg.

Hi-tech design methods and materials ensure extremely low interior noise levels, while precision tuning of all components and systematic hydraulic damping in the axle and drivetrain bearings provides excellent refinement.

The 2.0-litre TDI 177PS, 3.0-litre TDI 204PS, 3.0-litre TDI 245PS and 3.0-litre TFSI 300PS units all make use of advanced direct injection technology for the leanest possible fuel burn rate, and work in conjunction with important technologies from the brand's modular efficiency platform – the start-stop system, the energy recovery system and the innovative thermal management concept.

As a result, fuel economy has improved by up to 19 per cent compared to the previous model.

The drivetrain choice, based on the engine version, will include a manual six-speed transmission or continuously variable multitronic CVT for front-wheel-drive models, and the new seven-speed 'S tronic' twin-clutch transmission for quattros.

Each unit features a wide gear-ratio spread which makes a significant contribution to overall efficiency.

New energy-efficient electromechanical power steering, in conjunction with the lightweight suspension set-up, will impart even greater precision and composure.

The Audi's cabin is luxurious and classy

Comfort is highly prized in the executive saloon class. The A6 has a more refined ride that can, as before, cosset more completely if the option of adaptive air suspension with controlled damping is chosen.

The car's low, sleek roofline lends it a purposeful air which its optional LED headlights and LED daytime running lights emphasise further.

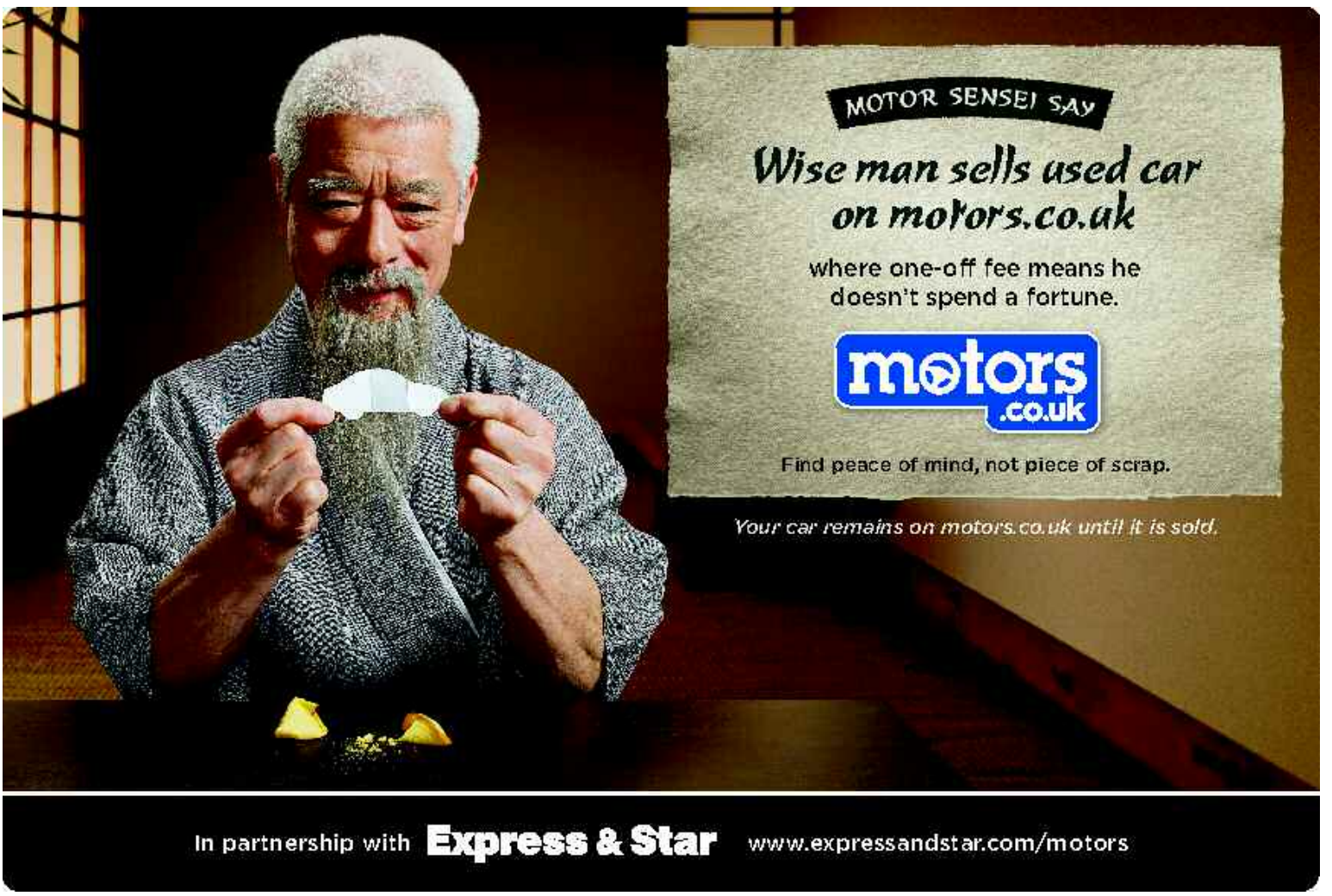
The roomy interior with its cocooning 'wraparound' dash panel combines the latest Audi design language with the most salient technological advances.

Supportive seats upholstered as standard in Milano leather position occupants perfectly in relation to the cabin's focal point, the Multi Media Interface with its 6.5-inch retractable monitor and large central control knob.

MMI provides easy and intuitive access to the high quality audio system, the Bluetooth phone interface and the SD card-based navigation system – a much prized asset which, uniquely in the premium sector at this level, is standard in the A6.

An eight-inch monitor and fingertip sensitive touch pad are available to upgrade MMI to MMI Touch.

The system's touch pad enables characters to be 'drawn' by the driver using an index finger for navigation or telephone data entry. As well as ultra-intelligent 3D navigation mapping, the new MMI Touch system can store audio tracks and telephone data.



We face confidence crisis, says Hou

Anfield return – Houl-

GERARD Houllier on Tuesday ordered his confidence-shy Villa team to show "mental strength" after his Liverpool return ended in disaster.

The claret and blues slumped to a 3-0 defeat at manager Houllier's former club – their fourth successive defeat – and they have now picked up just seven points from their last possible 30 in the league.

Villa were two behind within 16 minutes after David Ngog and Ryan Babel struck early on with Maxi Rodriguez sealing the win after a break for a Reds side without Fernando Torres, who was absent after his wife went into labour.

They now head into Saturday's derby with Albion at Villa Park just two points and two places above the Premier League drop zone.

Self-belief

The Frenchman admitted self-belief is in short supply in his squad at present.

"We are concerned," said Houllier. "The players and the staff have to take things in our hands.

"We need to address the confidence. There are areas in our game where we have improved like changing the way we play and approach the game. But, at the same time, we have to be stronger mentally as a team. I could see it even on the pitch.

"I think the first goal really affected our morale. We are not the most confident team at the moment and we are aware of that."

Houllier bemoaned Babel's goal, which was allowed by referee Phil Dowd despite the Dutchman being offside, albeit narrowly.

"We were on the back of three defeats so obviously the first goal looked as if it stunned us a bit," he said. "The second goal was offside but it was a vital goal because it meant that the game was over."

Houllier, boss at Anfield from 1998-2004, praised Liverpool fans for their warm reception for him'.

Chanted

"The fans were good and I appreciated the fact that they chanted my name at the end," he added.

Ciaran Clark will miss Saturday's game through suspension after collecting his fifth booking of the season during the game.

Villa are exposed on big night for the boss

GERARD Houllier spent a year in Liverpool as a teacher in 1970 – some 40 years later he watched his Villa team make the kind of errors which would make a team of schoolboys blush.

It was an emotional return to Anfield for the Villa boss who was welcomed by a banner from the home fans which read "Gerard's heart beats" and had his name sung on several occasions by the Kop.

But they will probably be the only fond memories Houllier will take from the match and he will have to go back to the chalkboard as his young side struggled on freezing night on Merseyside.

The work-rate of the Villa's players cannot be questioned but, as against Birmingham in the Carling Cup, despite some clever interplay and movement they simply did not create enough goalscoring chances.

Gabby Agbonlahor cut a frustrated figure in attack as he chased lost causes with little reward and save for the odd run from Marc Albrighton and the impressive Stewart Downing there was little penetration in the final third.

While Houllier's Anfield comeback dominated the build-up, it was the return of another former pupil which directly influenced matters on the pitch.

Stephen Warnock had a game to forget at left-back as he needlessly gave away the corner which led to the first goal and should

Liverpool 3
Villa 0

have marshalled Ryan Babel better for the all-important second.

None of Villa's back-line covered themselves in glory and with, 18 goals conceded on the road in the league this season, Houllier must address their defensive frailties urgently.

Villa's defenders were not helped by the manner in which they seemed to find new ways to squander possession from the simplest of situations.

However, the defeat must be placed within the context of Villa's recent injury problems. The turnover of senior players receiving treatment for various ailments has seen Bodymoor Heath resemble a Red Cross hospital rather than the club's training ground.

Yes, Liverpool were also without Steven Gerrard, Jamie Carragher and Fernando Torres but their deputies possessed much more experience than Villa's.

It would be unfair to castigate Houllier's youngsters for their roles in recent performances. The Premier League is a steep learning curve and the experience of playing in the centre of midfield against Liverpool will help the development of the likes of Jonathan Hogg and Ciaran Clark in the long run.

Undoubtedly Villa's league position is worrying, especially with a tough run of games heading into the Christmas period, starting with a derby against Albion on Saturday.

But the esteem with which Houllier is held by fans and players at Liverpool emphasises just why Villa supporters should show the patience and support required to help turn things round. Houllier was never going to be the kind of manager to provide a quick-fix solution at Villa Park and perhaps the Frenchman is guilty of trying to change too much, too quickly.

Newcastle's sacking of Chris Hughton on Monday, after defeat at The Hawthorns, demonstrates expectation levels in the Premier League have risen and how little patience there is in the modern game.

Villa's hierarchy appear to have recognised the bigger picture and they have made a long-term commitment to embrace Houllier's project.The Villa boss should be given time to implement his football philosophy.

At the moment things look bleak but with several of the club's talented youngsters signing new contracts over the past week, the glass is half full rather than half empty.

The forthcoming transfer window will also allow Houllier to bring in some fresh faces and move on some other players. He is, after all, working with a squad almost entirely chosen by his predecessor Martin O'Neill.

Villa fell behind in the 14th minute of the match when a Raul Meireles corner was met by Martin Skrtel whose initial header was directed past Brad Friedel by David Ngog.

Two minutes later the visitors found themselves two down. Clark gave the ball away cheaply in midfield and Lucas took advantage of the error to slip an inch-perfect pass into the path of Babel.

Slotting

The Dutch winger was in an offside position but the ease with which Warnock was beaten to the ball characterised his recent struggles.

Encouragingly for the frozen Villa away fans, Houllier introduced Nathan Delfouneso for Clark at half-time and the presence of an extra attacking option with Stephen Ireland slotting into central midfield gave Villa a renewed impetus.

They really should have pulled a goal back moments after the interval when Agbonhalor's close-range shot from Downing's cross was saved by Pepe Reina before Paul Konchesky cleared.

But the change in approach left the Villa rearguard exposed and a swift Liverpool counter-attack in the 55th minute effectively secured the points for Roy Hodgson's side.

Reina found Maxi Rodriguez with a quick throw and he exchanged passes with Ngog before applying a superb finish with a shot placed into the top corner.

Houllier then made a double change, as John Carew and Robert Pires came on for Agbonlahor and Albrighton, but the game had long since slipped away from them.

Liverpool almost added to Houllier's misery with a fourth in the 67th minute when Glen Johnson broke into the penalty area, only to be thwarted by Friedel's fine block.

Sotirios Kyrgiakos was even closer with a header that was goalbound until Hogg cleared the ball off the line by the post.

It was a result which will have irked Houllier the teacher as much as Houllier the manager, but the main thing from his perspective is whether the lessons have been taken on board.

Hopefully when it comes to the final examination at the end of the season – coincidentally against Liverpool – Villa will pass with flying colours.

Roy Hodgson and Gerard Houllier watch on as David Ngog gets clear of James Collins to head home the opener

Grim clash is another cup nightmare for Villa

YET again the Carling Cup proved the competition with a sting in its tail for Aston Villa.

Eight months ago, it came in the shape of some contentious refereeing decisions in the Wembley final which helped Manchester United slip off with the trophy.

Last weel, a late and lucky winner from the game's least-likely candidate gave Birmingham City a hard-earned victory, promptly soured by the flare-firing yobs who taunted Villa fans after the final whistle.

It was all pretty grim stuff. In a nutshell, Villa made a bright start and conceded a soft penalty against the run of play dispatched by Sebastian Larsson. Gabby Agbonlahor bagged the equaliser and Houllier's men were on top for most of the second half. Their football, however, is lacking a hard edge and it was Blues, as stubborn and tenacious as ever, who nicked victory with an 84th minute winner from Nikola Zigic.

The giant Serb still looks dreadfully out of place amid the frenetic dimensions of the English game, magnified of course by this derby setting, and more like a signing to embarrass rather than elevate Alex McLeish.But the shrewd and likeable Blues boss saw his St Andrew's resume lifted by Zigic's scuffed shot from a Cameron Jerome cross which took a kind bounce off Luke Young's attempted block and looped over a despairing Brad Friedel.

Blues 2
Villa 1

It was cruel on Villa but then the season has been so far generally – from Martin O'Neill's ill-timed walk-out through to the crippling injury list which has hampered Houllier's return to the English stage.

But they are in danger of kidding themselves if they think all will be well when more senior players are fit again.

Villa have major concerns in the centre of defence which has become as soft as their football under Houllier; yes, it is more pleasing on the eye but lacking the cutting edge that became a feature of the O'Neill years.

Soft

In contrast, Blues are the arch realists of the dogfight in the Premier League's bottom half. They have barely raised a dozen shots at goal in the last four games but emerged undefeated in each having beaten the champions and reached the Carling Cup semi-finals – Houllier and his lieutenants Gary McAllister and Gordon Cowans need to inject a little of that pragmatism into a team which has youthful talent emerging but is soft around the edges.

Of particular concern will be the collapsing twin pillars of last season, Richard Dunne and James Collins, who were uneasy figures when it mattered last Wednesday.

Dunne produced a clumsy challenge on Lee Bowyer as he charged through from midfield in the 11th minute after Collins had twice failed to deal with a rudimentary punt towards his team's area.

It is difficult not to conclude that the Dunne of last season was a sharper beast who would not have got himself in the position to allow Bowyer ahead of him.

With a penalty, drilled safely by Larsson to Friedel's left as the keeper guessed right, from their first attack, Blues could lay claim to have doubled their advantage from their second.

Friedel fumbled a low shot through a crowded area from Zigic after his defenders had failed to deal with a corner and TV replays showed that the ball had crossed the line. But Villa were spared – a touch controversially – by an offside flag against Scott Dann on the goalline, although whether or not he was interfering with play was a matter for debate.

It appeared to be a significant let-off, however, because a couple of minutes later Villa were level thanks to the kind of break from defence their supporters remember so well from the O'Neill era.

A wonderful line-ball from Stephen Warnock was gathered by Ashley Young and worked inside to Downing.

He got a break at that point as the back-tracking Roger Johnson inadvertently provided the perfect set-up for Agbonlahor on the edge of the area but the man who had scored winners on his two previous visits to St Andrew's spun away from Bowyer to beat Ben Foster with an angled finish.

And if Villa took nothing else away from this tie, the sight of Agbonlahor running freely and menacingly again was at least heartening.

The half would be completed with just one more clear opportunity emerging from football as harsh as the freezing, snow-swirling conditions but Jerome, set free by Zigic, clipped his finish agonisingly wide over the advancing Friedel.

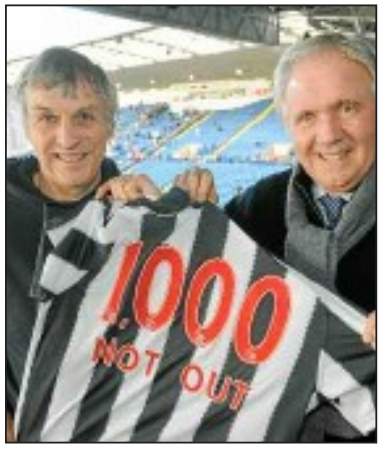
But it was all Villa after the break only for McLeish's redoubtable defence to repel – a little too easily – everything that came at them until the last 10 minutes began with Foster proving yet again that McLeish knows how to pick a goalkeeper.

Vital

The man who took over from Joe Hart produced a vital save at the feet of Young following an electric break from Agbonlahor because moments later, Blues were shaping the game's deciding moment. Larsson faded a fine ball down the side of Villa's defence which Jerome sped on to with an urgency Dunne failed to match as the Villa skipper ambled over to cover.

Jerome pounced on Dunne's complacency. He pulled back a perfect service which wrong-footed Collins and found Zigic running in from the far post for a goal McLeish will hope gives his £6m signing the platform he needs to make a success of his career in England.

It clinched his club's first defeat of their old rivals since 2005 and, if nothing else startling comes his way, for that they will always be grateful.



Dave Watkin, left, with Bobby Hope, celebrates his 1,000th consecutive Albion match

Superfan David guest of honour at 1,000th match

ALBION super fan David Watkin received VIP treatment from the Baggies after chalking up an amazing 1,000 consecutive matches.

The 63-year-old reached the milestone at last Wednesday's Carling Cup match at Ipswich. And he was treated like a king at Albion's Premier League game against Newcastle yesterday, where his heroes rewarded his loyalty with a win.

The retired IT project manager received a signed Baggies shirt and a shield from Hawthorns legend Bobby Hope

Mr Watkin, a married father-of-two from Kingswinford, started his sequence of consecutive matches in 1991. Since then he has been to every match at home, away and abroad.

He said: "I've always been to games on a regular basis, but in 1991 I went to all of the games at the end of the season when we got relegated to the Third Division, then I went to all of the games in the Third Division.

"From then it carried on because I used to play football for the supporters' team, West Bromwich Albion Strollers against the opposition supporters on the morning of the matches.

"So if you didn't go, you would be letting down your team as well as missing a match.

Grandchildren

"Having been to every game in that season and the next couple of seasons, we ended up playing in the Anglo-Italian Cup and I went to a match at Cosenza when Albion had already been knocked out and only 14 Albion supporters went.

"So once you've done that you just carry on."

David's daughters, Emma and Helen, are both Albion fans and he has three grandchildren including Evie, who made her first visit to The Hawthorns at the age of three months.

But he admitted his wife Judith, aged 61, is often a 'football widow'.

"My wife isn't an Albion fan, in fact she is from South Shields in the North East, but she does a lot to help me to get to the matches," he said.

"We go to South Shields at Christmas and we have a Boxing Day fixture, so we often have to leave at 8am or 9am to get to the game. When we played Reading away at lunchtime for a TV match on Boxing Day we had to leave at around 6am and my wife had to work very hard to convince my mother-in-law this was a good idea."

Runners closing gap on top spot

WEST Bromwich Harriers are four points off the top postion in the Birmingham League Cross Country Division 3.

At a very icy and cold Burbage Common, Nuneaton, West Brom's men's squad all ran with passion, in a bid to overhall a 45 point gap from the first fixture.

Fantastic team spirit from the small squad saw James Jefferson come third, Gurmel Dehl fifth, Gary Clifton 17th, Malcolm Carr 18th, Gary Whitehouse 25th and Ian Phillips 29th – scoring 97 points and reducing the deficit.

Steve Pitt (30) and Paul Mansell (126) completed the Harriers results.

Team Captain Malcolm Carr, better known as Blind Dave Heeley's running mate, said: "What an awesome team performance and we now have to build on this for the remaining two races in 2011."

The Ladies were also competing on Saturday at Perry Barr, Kuldeep Samra, Sarah Greenlees, Caroline Lane and Gaye Clough, also ran in icy conditions.

For more information on West Bromwich Harriers go online to www.wbhac.co.uk.

Tug teams battled

TUG-of-war teams descended on Smethwick for a national competition. Competitors headed to the Harry Mitchell Leisure Centre to test their strength.

Deputy mayor of Sandwell, Councillor Joyce Underhill, even had a go at the Broomfield venue on Saturday.

Men's teams battled it out in six different weight categories, with the chance to represent England at the UK Indoor Championships up for grabs. Overall winner was the team from Sheen, in North Staffordshire, which scooped five of the six titles. A team from Norton, also in Staffordshire, claimed the other.

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sport

Newcastle's Jose Enrique desperately tries to clear after Albion's Peter Odemwingie bags his second against the Magpies at the Hawthorns, as helpless 'keeper Tim Krul looks on

Lukewarm Albion on a sub-zero night

Ipswich 1 Albion 0

ALBION have laid the foundations for a truly momentous season.

But they left icy Ipswich last week knowing it will end with at least one huge regret.

A controversial second-half penalty from Grant Leadbitter was enough to dump the Baggies out of the Carling Cup and end supporters' dreams of a first major cup final appearance in 40 years.

It is impossible to escape the feeling Roberto Di Matteo and his players tossed away a glorious opportunity with a dismal no-show on a snowy Suffolk evening.

His team selection was the source of major debate in the wake of a gloomy defeat, and with good reason. Even after successfully ringing the changes for earlier rounds of the cup, the decision to replace nine members of the side that beat Everton with a place at Wembley within sniffing distance was a major gamble that backfired on Di Matteo.

The Hawthorns head coach is entitled to the occasional mistake and he has barely made any since walking through the doors 18 months ago. Nevertheless, last Wednesday felt like a misjudgement of the mood of Baggies fans desperate not just for Premier League progress but for cup glory.

The boss would argue, however, that the men who had propelled the Baggies to within two victories of the final had earned the right to complete the job. For better or worse, he kept faith. Too many of the fringe players in a side that included seven full internationals contributed to hanging their gaffer out to dry.

Opportunity

They could not have asked for a clearer opportunity to reach a major semi-final with Ipswich boss Roy Keane hamstrung by injuries, suspensions and cup-tied loanees, forced to field a team packed with rookies. Even a second-string Albion side should have been good enough to dispose of the Portman Road kids. Yet they inexplicably failed to perform.

Even allowing for the controversy surrounding the Tractor Boys' winning penalty, the Baggies got what they deserved. Only the ever-improving Somen Tchoyi and shock inclusion James Hurst gave the freezing faithful anything to cheer. For the most part it was a luke-warm showing on a sub-zero night.

Albion made a nervous start and it was the hosts who threatened first when Steven Reid's misplaced header allowed Tamas Priskin the opportunity to charge down the right flank. His cross to the near post found David Norris but he fired wide under pressure from Pablo Ibanez.

Albion were soon applying pressure and home keeper Brian Murphy had to make a smart near-post save to deny Marc-Antoine Fortune after a neat ball from Simon Cox.

But it was Keane's men who should have led on 11 minutes when the offside flag stayed down as Priskin darted onto Jason Scotland's through-ball, only to send a shot trickling tamely through to Boaz Myhill as Hurst did his best to apply pressure from the side. They missed another fabulous chance moments later when Priskin burst clear of Ibanez after the Spaniard stumbled. His cross found Scotland unmarked but the striker fired too close to Myhill.

The Baggies might have scored the softest of openers when Darren O'Dea failed to deal with a routine high ball and Giles Barnes stole in but his low shot was saved by Murphy. The 'keeper did well again to leap high and keep out a Graham Dorrans cross that was heading for the top corner. But he almost gifted the Baggies a goal when he fumbled a cross to the feet of striker Cox but his lob dropped over the crossbar.

Grant Leadbitter's powerful shot was parried by Myhill and Scotland failed to connect with the rebound.

Ten minutes before the break Albion had two half-chances. First Cox curled a shot wide after a neat lay-off from Marc-Antoine Fortune, then Barnes could not quite stretch far enough at the far post to head home an excellent Tchoyi cross. Baggies had a huge let-off when they were caught out at the back, Priskin burst into the box and was tripped by the diving Myhill, only for referee Michael Jones to wave away penalty appeals to the disgust of Ipswich.

Ipswich should have been ahead just after the hour when Andros Townsend lofted a ball into the box and Priskin drifted between Abdoulaye Meite and Marek Cech, only to send his free header looping over the bar.

They finally made the breakthrough with 22 minutes remaining, albeit in controversial circumstances. Dorrans might well have made some contact with substitute Carlos Edwards as the former Wolves loan man burst towards the byline after being gifted possession by Cech.

But Edwards wasted no time in hitting the turf and the Scot protested, with some justification, that the offence was committed just outside the area.

Leadbitter showed no mercy, however, as he drilled the spot kick hard into the bottom corner.

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Thursday, December 9, 2010

Albion's man-of-the-moment Peter Odemwingie rounds Newcastle goalkeeper Tim Krul to fire home and put the Baggies three-up at The Hawthorns

Classy Baggies Toon up for double derby days

Albion 3 Newcastle 1

BAGGIES fans cannot have relished a derby week quite this much in years.

A fabulous victory over Newcastle at The Hawthorns took Roberto Di Matteo and Co past the halfway mark in their quest for the magical 40 points to break their yo-yo cycle.

It set them up perfectly for the meetings with Villa and Wolves that could turn an already memorable season into a truly special campaign.

Albion supporters will approach clashes with their nearest and dearest in the next fortnight with genuine excitement. It has been a generation since a Baggies side took on their closest geographical rivals in England's top division believing they can pull off an historic double success.

Two tremendous victories in nine days have banished worries of an Albion slump and restored the feel-good factor that was established in the opening period of the season. And the latest success with arguably their slickest performance of the season highlighted just how far the Baggies have come in the seven months since a return to the Premier League was confirmed with victory at Doncaster.

Di Matteo's men ended last season 11 points behind the Toon, who were runaway winners of the Championship.

Yet the Baggies played much of Sunday's one-sided game on a different planet to the Magpies.

The hosts dominated their woeful visitors for all but 10 minutes, demonstrating if they needed to the giant strides they have continued to make since Di Matteo became the latest man entrusted with establishing the Baggies among the elite.

They might have started the match locked together on points but the teams ended it poles apart as Albion offered a national television audience more clear evidence that this season could be the one when they finally become the genuine article in the Premier League.

Di Matteo's men ended the game one point off sixth place and with memories of a tricky November run fading into the distance after seven goals and six points from the last two matches.

Everywhere the head coach looked, there was good news as his thoughts began to turn to the first of his big derby appointments – Saturday's eagerly-awaited trip to face under-pressure Villa.

Paul Scharner and Gabriel Tamas showed signs of striking up an effective central defensive partnership while Gonzalo Jara and Marek Cech delivered impressive displays at full-back.

The elusive clean sheet escaped them again thanks to Peter Lovenkrands' last-gasp consolation effort for the visitors. But the signs were good at the back.

In midfield, Graham Dorrans produced a hugely efficient display in an unaccustomed holding role while Chris Brunt and James Morrison gave hard-working and inventive displays at the heart of the team. Somen Tchoyi stepped in for a rare start and gave the kind of jack-in-the-box showing that will make him hard to drop while Jerome Thomas was back to close to his best on the opposite flank.

In attack, Peter Odemwingie shook off his continuing knee discomfort to score two ultra-cool goals with a flashback to the kind of form that made him an instant hit after his summer arrival.

For 45 minutes the Toon simply could not handle the Baggies, who moved the ball with an assurance and precision that was too good for their opponents to live with. The only worry for a dominant home side was that they reached half-time just one goal to the good, Tchoyi producing another memorable strike to beat Tim Krul after he had collected Brunt's pass and side-stepped Jose Enrique.

The hosts needn't have worried, because despite a more evenly-matched second half, the result was rarely in doubt. Only one goal-bound header from Steven Taylor – pushed away by Scott Carson – offered genuine alarm for the Baggies, who made sure of the points with two incisive counter-attacking strikes by Odemwingie.

First he seized on a slip by Danny Guthrie to sprint away and slide a shot into the bottom corner. Then he raced clear of a horribly square Newcastle defence to collect Cech's lofted pass and make it 3-0.

The Toon reduced the arrears in stop-page time when Carson made a fine save from Andy Carroll, only for Lovenkrands to convert the rebound. But it was the only blight on an otherwise perfect day for the skipper and his colleagues.

Villa and Wolves will have noted it with interest. There might even be a measure of trepidation as the derby days edge closer. But for Albion, they cannot come soon enough.

TALKING POINT

SHOULD YOUSSOUF MULUMBU WIN AN INSTANT RECALL? The hugely popular midfielder has undoubtedly been one of the major stars of the Baggies' fine season so far. But so strong was Albion's reshuffled midfield on Sunday that the DR Congo international might just be wondering if he is guaranteed a return to the side when they travel to Villa on Saturday. Graham Dorrans operated in Mulumbu's customary holding role against the Magpies and his energy and composure on the ball helped the team retain possession effectively.

With Chris Brunt and James Morrison also in impressive form, any one of the trio would be unfortunate to be dropped for Mulumbu, who might fear a heavy price for his silly sending off and subsequent suspension.

Next three games...

VILLA (A) DEC 11

The clubs have rarely been this closely matched, so the Baggies will never have a better chance to beat their local rivals.

WOLVES (H) DEC 19

Expect an electric Hawthorns atmosphere for the first top-fight Black Country derby in more than two decades.

BOLTON (A) DEC 26

Two of the surprise packages of the season could serve up a Christmas cracker at the Reebok Stadium, with both sides favouring a passing game.

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